Bill Nichols

The Memory of Loss

Péter Forgács's Saga of Family Life and Social Hell

It is not exactly the presence of a thing but rather the absence of it that becomes the cause and impulse for creative motivation.

—Alexander Archipenko

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A film about the past can be a film for the future.

—Erwin Leiser, director of *Mein Kampf*

Over the past twenty years, Péter Forgács has created more than thirty films. Most of them examine the private histories of European families, from the Nazi era of the 1930s and 1940s to the Communist era of the postwar period. The home movies from which he compiles his own films are by people who don't know what the future will be but who offer their lives to those who now know what the past has been. We yearn to see in what they saw evidence of the history they had yet to encounter. We also yearn to see the world as they did, with serenity and innocence blind to its own future. Watching these films can produce a certain sense of panic: Where are we as we watch this footage and note Forgács's emendations? —Here or there, now or then? And if we are, in some strange way, both here and now *and* there and then, how is it that such a divided position is both desired and disturbing?

Two of three major series that aired on European television that involved Forgács take up the private history of European families in the 1930s and 1940s: the international "An Unknown War" series to which Forgács contributed *Meanwhile Somewhere* and the 12-part "Private Hungary" series that Forgács made on his own. (The third series is the five-part "Conversations on Psychoanalysis"; it deals with Freud, Ferenczi, and the psychoanalytic legacy.)

His most recent films—*Free Fall* (1996), *The Maelstrom* (1997), *Kádar's Kiss* (1997), *The Danube Exodus* (1998), and *Angelos' Film* (1999), like his previous ones, revolve around found footage. Specifically, they take shape around home movies that Forgács restructures into historical portraits. He relies on the huge collection of home movies that he has acquired since he began working first at the Cultural Research Institute and then with the Béla Balázs Studio in Budapest. Great effort goes into preserving the qualities of the original home movies and also adding a vivid sense of historical perspective. Interviews with surviving fam-

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Angelos' honeymoon, from *Angelos' Film* (opposite page); The Peereboom family, in *The Maelstrom* (above); *Angelos' Film* (right)

ily members provide surprising details; historical research yields new perspectives.

Many of his most moving films, such as *The Bartos Family* (1988), *Free Fall, The Maelstrom, The Danube Exodus,* and *Angelos' Film,* derive from the home movie footage of a single individual. *The Bartos Family* traces the fate of one family over two decades. We see bodies erode, hope fade and losses occur, but we also see moments of exuberance and gusto, of men and women living life to the fullest. As Michael Roth said on a panel discussion, "I get a strong sense of the sheer physicality of this family; it would take a hell of lot to kill people like this."[1] *Free Fall* chronicles the experience of György Petö from the early 1930s to World War II. Petö was a wealthy Hungarian Jew whose home movies provide the bulk of the footage. From them Forgács fashions a mesmerizing portrait of a family and a way of life whose pleasures and privileges are being relentlessly eroded at the very same moment as György persists in enjoying them.

The Maelstrom traces the Peereboom family, a Jewish Dutch family, over a similar period through the home movies of one of the family patriarch's three sons, Max. We see Max and his relatives mature and prosper until the parallel world of the Nazis' Final Solution collides with their own—a parallel rendered with cinematic force through Forgács's inclusion of home movies by Reich Commissioner for The Netherlands Seyss-Inquart. Whereas Max's footage conveys the innocence of the unsuspecting victim, Seyss-Inquart's suggests the confidence of the overbearing victor.

Danube Exodus uses footage by riverboat Captain Nándor Andrásovits to follow his fitful voyages up and down the Danube, through Bulgarian and Romanian territory, transporting Hungarian Jews to the Black Sea for passage to Palestine and returning with German farmers, driven out of Bessarabia by the Soviet army,

Dancing on the ship bound for Palestine, in *Danube Exodus*

for eventual relocation in occupied Poland. If *Danube Exodus* chronicles these diasporic shifts from the point of view of a crucial but somewhat removed participant, *Angelos' Film* chronicles the German occupation of Greece from the point of view of a Greek patriot. Angelos Papanastassiou used his camera to document an occupation he detested as an affront to Greek sovereignty. His footage possesses a degree of historical consciousness absent from the more strictly home movie footage shot by others. This relieves Forgács of some of the task of providing context and commentary. In a time and place where filming such as Angelos' was punishable by death, Forgács allows us to witness the very *act* of filmmaking as a form of defiant resistance, not unlike his own act of recovery and reassemblage.

Through the eerily effective music of Tibor Szemzö, laconic commentary, titles, zooms and pans, tinting and toning, slow motion, freeze framing and *oratorio* (used to articulate the details of the laws used to limit participation by the "Israelite denomination" in public life) Forgács turns salvaged images into a vivid glimpse of a lost world. The spontaneous gestures, improvised scenes, and concrete situations we observe were not designed as indicators of broad historical forces but as animated mementos of personal history. But the social actors in these home movies who mime gestures to each other now incite our response rather than the response of those to whom they originally addressed themselves. Forgács, the archaeologist cum salvage anthropologist, conducts a séance in which these figures serve as mediums through whom we see and hear the voice of times past speak again, today.

BILL NICHOLS: *The world to which you return us in the films I've summarized above is the world of middle and upper class Jewish life in Hungary and other parts of Europe (these were the classes that could afford to make home movies) during the rise of Nazism and the harbingers of the Holocaust to come. Every frame of footage possesses the aura of a rare artifact. Zoltán Bartos, for example, compressed his life from the 1920s to the mid 50s into a total of nine hours of film. You compress this into* The Bartos Family, *a sixty-minute film. What gets left behind? How much more do you become a member of the family than we do? Is it important that much of your archive comes from non-Jewish as well as Jewish families?*

PÉTER FORGÁCS: It's always intriguing to imagine how somebody else would create a totally different cinematic meaning from the same stuff, and luckily the Bartos collection was in the hand of two film makers, Gábor Bódy and Péter Timár, prior to my acquisition of it. Their inspiring approach in *Private History* (1978) emphasized the burlesque aspect of the Bartos' lives and expanded the boundaries of a found footage collage. The in-depth interview with the last from the old generation, Klári—the widow of Ödön Bartos—clarified the family dynamics and gossipy aspects of their lives. When I took this first voyage, thanks to the film by Bódy and Timár, it made me a participant-observer on their anthropological team and put me into intimate contact with the Bartos family. When the actual home movies "fell into my hands" it was a cathartic moment as I watched the small jumpy images in my little office. I had installed a Pathé 9.5 mm projector there, and since the sprocket holes were

in the middle of the film, it caused a jumping image effect.

Watching the fading figures of the Bartos family from the "real" 1920s Hungary blew my mind. The first feeling was a certain presence of a daemon—my daemon, the daemon of the speaking Socrates: *I know this is what I am going to do from now on*. It was like the writer Gabriel Marquez's description of writing *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. He said that before he wrote a single page, he had envisioned the entire body of the novel while driving down a long valley in South America. The second emotional and magnetic touch of this little private viewing was a mysterious and almost telepathic feeling of being a coroner. All of them—the personae appearing in this cinematographic image—are dead, and I am alive, perceiving here—in my local time—their past as a presence. It is their past but at the same time it is seemingly present.

Your overall oeuvre does not focus exclusively on life before the Holocaust. In films like Kádar's Kiss *you stress that a pornographic form of oppression continued for many of the inhabitants of Eastern Europe long after the Allies achieved victory over the Axis powers.*

In only five of twenty films of mine are the subject/heroes a Jewish family or tale, story. As a consequence it is more true to say Christian and Jewish families. The Christian Hungarian and the Jewish Hungarian middle classes suffered from Communism. As you know, the sufferings of the two social groups is radically different, during and after WW2. Two-thirds of Hungarian Jews were gassed, tortured, and plundered in 1944-45. The survivors had to live through the communist oppression; the wealthy had to endure Soviet style nationalization—they lost the remnants of their fortune. The plundering and oppression of the Christian middle and upper classes began with the first Soviet boot on Hungarian soil in 1944, and lasted almost until the fall of the Berlin wall.

I experience your films as a gift, an unexpected act of generosity, or love, that establishes a relationship beyond obligation or duty. It is perhaps less a form of righteously bearing witness than one of discreetly acknowledging the loves and lives of others. You do not recount atrocities or mount indictments so much as bring something very precious and almost lost back to life. But the films are also, inevitably, an act of hate. The hatred streams toward those figures and forces that brought an end to an entire way of life and its complex fabric. You single out killers like Reich Commissioner for The Netherlands Seyss-Inquart, whose own home movies (of his wife and children, his estate and horses, his tennis court and games with Himmler, culled from the Royal Dutch Film Archive) you weave into The Maelstrom. *You recount the heinous laws of exclusion promulgated by Seyss-Inquart in The Netherlands—in voice-over commentary, subtitles, and sometimes in sung oratory—laws that stripped Jews like the Peereboom of the rights of citizenship, the very same citizenship to which their own home movies are such exuberant testimony.*[2]

What about these laws? How did you chose to include them in the films? . . . They have an oddly rational air, in the highly bureaucratic sense of trying to specify every possibility and to offer the hope of "exceptionalism"—that others will be affected but that I will remain exempt due to my profession, war service, medals . . .

I think *The Maelstrom* film could never have been born without the *Free Fall* piece. You mention the paradoxical feature of Jewish Laws; they are even more nightmarish in *Free Fall,* as the Petö family's life goes on seemingly undisturbed while their social and human rights are *gradually* strangled. The complex history of assimilation and the economic role of the high and rich strata of the Hungarian Jews demanded *differentiation and selection* by this hypocritical legislation. It occurred in four stages between 1938-44. When Eichmann strode onto the Hungarian stage it became simple: no differentiation, just *final solution*.

Dutch society's resistance demanded a different Nazi psycho-script for that stage: the gradual introduction of Jewish laws (1940-43), and the perfectly camouflaged *separation, plundering, and extermination* of the Dutch Jewry. This script was the "masterpiece" of Seyss-Inquart. This irrational abuse of law introduced a new terror in the context of war. The real provocation in both films for me was how to represent, how to tinge the *inner* experience of a Dutch or a Hungarian Jewish family during this period.

Your quest for the inner experience seems to revolve, in part, around the selection and placement of specific images. There are few of the iconic, unforgettable, "larger than life" type images that are so prevalent in histories from above and in photo-journalism. Instead you pick and choose from the detritus of the everyday. You select shots that at first glance appear to be "throw-aways" but that reverberate with overtones.

We encounter scenes in The Maelstrom, *for example, that are like ruins or fragments, from which you construct new meanings, and warnings. We see Max Peereboom's own footage of the construction of his*

The cigarette smoker in *The Maelstrom*

and Annie, his wife's, home in Vlissingen, but the footage now appears in a story of a different order.
The footage fits into so many categories that it demands a dynamic *explanation:* first of all it's a miniature film essay by the proud Max; his wife's step-parents are building (financing) a whole big family house for them!!! (Annie was adopted as a poor child at age 10-11 by the Bouman couple because they didn't have children) so it is a dream of dreams for Max and Annie.

Second: it's a brilliant occasion for Max to film the construction of a Dutch citizen's house—the site, the workers, the constructor, the family visit and the working process. Thirdly, it's also a record of the small moments of relationships: the mother-in-law lays a brick, clever movements, the hand-shaking (meanwhile the constructor pulls Annie in the background), the cigar given to the foreman. . . .

All of it flashes before me as a dynamic, psychological, multi-leveled structure in a time-based art. And in the wider range of story-telling possibilities, it serves as "the building of the nest," it prepares the space for family expectations; it happens before the birth of their little girl, Flora.

The marriage-house-children plan, as a frame, makes their happiness. For us today, here and now, with our historical knowledge, we add an unforgettable and unforgiving dramatic perspective: the invisible shadows over their happy moments. This happy moment conjures in our mind other constructions as a deep undercurrent of unconscious expectations—torturous death in a gas chamber—an undercurrent hidden at this film moment to the future victims. It is therefore never realized, made visible, in my films.

This is not to say much about scenes as sources of fact, but it may explain the structure of a spiraling maelstrom: At which sequence, which episode do you realize the swirl, when do you start to become anxious and feel their end?

Your films revolve around the classic rhetorical figure of catachresis: they wrench meaning from home movies, from moments of everyday life that contest the notion of history as a national theater or grand stage upon which only the great or mighty strut.
Memories of the Bartos's are part of a collective Hungarian memory. Their life models a microcosm of life through a century in a nutshell. History is dynamic and tragic: the fall of the Hapsburg *Kaiser und König*, the revolutions and counter-revolutions, revanche and revisionism. Hungary as Nazi ally and later the victim of a *totalen Krieg*, the Soviet liberation/occupation, and the revolution of 1956. After 33 years of pink communism the Berlin Wall fell: the 20th century happened between 1918 and 1989. The large *curtain of public history* provides the background for the Bartos Family Saga.

Your films entail a paradoxical form of speech in which what went unnamed and forgotten becomes the crux of an act of historical remembering. You resurrect what lies on the verge of total loss and instill an awareness of historical consciousness per se more than a didactic perspective. Your films are not a documentary representation of national culture or indigenous Jewish or Christian life in the strict sense (they withhold facts; they confound assumptions); they are not a metaphor for symbolic loss (the lives we see remain anchored in their own specificity); they are not a deconstruction of types and stereotypes others have given to the period, its monumental war, its horrific genocide and numerous victims (this you leave to others). They have a strongly both/and quality as being both of the period and about the period, like Esther Shub's compilation of archive footage into

works such as The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty *(1927).*

I really love these scratchy, old films; this is a strong motive in itself. Hard to put it in words, but if you allow me, these are the rules of my patchwork-game:

First: no tautology of meanings, and no use of facts as illustration in the work;

Second: find what is the magic of these unconscious home filmstrips, the magic of re-contextualizing, layer after layer to feel the graphic intensity of each frame;

Third: I want to make films for my friends, the reference group: "Look what I've found for you," while I peel the source material to its roots;

Fourth: do not explain, or educate, but involve, engulf the viewer as much possible;

Fifth: address *the unconscious,* the sensitive, unspeakable, touchable but mostly silent part of the viewer;

Sixth: let the music orchestrate and *rule* the emotional story;

Seventh: I had to learn how to hear my own *low inner voice,* the guide of creation—if I can chase away, or reduce, the noise in the channel.

In general, the 20th century's film language(s) have become enormously varied and sensitive, but the didactic documentary resides at some distance from the heights of this achievement. It is mostly part of the educational, entertainment wave, planning for infantile expectations. The general landscape of docs is awful, as it was always. Of course the commissioners and programmers are in the pincers of the media. With few exceptions I can't stand docs. I prefer Kienholz, Duchamp, alchemy and psycho-archeology.

You reassemble aspects of an image repertoire that might have represented Jewish life and Hungarian culture—had it survived. This life and culture is a structuring absence that now speaks through you, perhaps more as a clairvoyant than a documentarian. If the home movies' makers adopt a posture something like, "I speak about us to us," you provide a simultaneous overlay something like, "I speak about them to you." We feel we are onlookers—poignantly and erotically, for example, when György films his fiancé Eva bathing and then disrobing in their bedroom, her eyes turned toward the camera and the man, her lover, behind it—as well as participants in your own effort to re-frame their precious moments of private reverie within the historical context that will engulf them.

A short meditation on privacy, intimacy: The key to this genre is the paradox of a gentle viewing of the *forbidden, the taboo, even if it's an unimportant event, even in the framework of home movies, just a smile.* I seek a procedure to transfer toward a metaphysical level the banality of existence.

We are allowed to see, look under the pants, visiting the film-diary of the *anima* and the *animus*. We observe the home of a local inhabitant, as the filmmaker is both witness to and naïve anthropologist of his/her own life. Don't forget we are in the realm of banality. The banality of selected life facts shines on the border of the public and private.

Our current, unlimited media transmits and creates hunger for the showbiz stars' privacy, and for media-made heroes, but this is relatively new. I mean the limitless TV service of *peeping*. The visible bed secrets of dad and mom are rare in home movies. Much more often one sees *just* the first steps of the baby, but

The Petö wedding, in *Free Fall*

Eva in *Free Fall*

those can be as intimate as the bed-secret stories—the meaning of intimacy is quite relative.

Clinton's "Oval Office Cigar Phantasm" [*Forgács' term for President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky*] breaks with historic limits; it dovetails with the wide-ranging exhibitionism of public performers who serve the customers' immeasurable hunger for "what's behind the curtain." The rules of privacy vs. publicity changed radically only in the last quarter of the 20th century. Prior to this era religion, laws, common "sense" . . . the cantor-Talibans ruled life. For example, compare the length of the sixties mini-skirts to the length of these women's great-grandmothers' skirts. . . . The home movies represent a different world.

These re-contextualized home movies—like Mr. Petö's—aren't planned for the public's eye. By saying *Private Hungary,* I am opening these capsules for the public eye. It is like lighting a cigarette in darkness: you see the smoker's hand and face for a few seconds, it become a vision we imprint, a secret. The other edge is the Peeping Tom's voyeuristic attitude: it reveals the torture and exploitation of the victim. Another aspect of intimacy in relation to these home movies is the collage technique, as the classic de- and re-contextualising process. The metaphysical level of meaning calls for the freedom to touch, alter, edit, combine and readjust the original meaning toward a new context. Finding the images behind the surface. All three aspects are embarrassing and alluring at the same time. How can I open up the private and intimate not-for-public-eyes footage to a larger context? The "psychoanalysis" of film diary notes. I have to stay gentle to keep my distance right.

Your films have many distinctive qualities—most notably their highly evocative reconstruction of artifacts in an ironic, modernist key. What are the models from which you work? Are modernist authors like Woolf or Joyce instructive for you in any particular way? What are the conventions you systematically shun, and why do you do so?

Joyce's method—a 24-hour/day habit—was collecting words, colloquialisms, and language games. The concrete existence of a *real* Stephen Bloom at the Sunday market that we see in *The Maelstrom* links up, for me, with the Joycean Bloom. The "fiction," transferred back and fourth with "reality," marks *The Maelstrom* here for some Joyce readers. A "real" Bloom— transformed by allusion to the fictional one: documentary as fiction and fiction as documentary. Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* (1932) proves the author's effort to create a fact—known to him—for the film. It is a "fact" but it might not have happened in this specific way without the director's intervention. Reality is *created* for the film: they killed a goat to represent the Spanish rural drama. The smoking man's factuality in *The Maelstrom* is a *metaphor* for the year 1939, and Buñuel's goat sacrifice is a *fiction* that became the *reality* of Spain. The converse way of working is also possible. Jay Rosenblatt's extraordinary films such as *The Smell of Burning Ants* (1994) or *Human Remains* (1998) come to mind: amateur and archival footage becomes the fiction of an inner reality.

Your films are not history from above nor are they history from below. We see no concentration camps, no smoking chimneys, no Jewish ghettos or grinning Nazi doctors. Portents for us—foreboding signs of ominous destruction—are just another element in the stuff of everyday life for the original subjects and makers of these films. To watch Béla Liebmann, a noted photographer, in Free Fall, *for example, mug for the camera while performing demeaning manual labor for the "Volunteer Labor Service," a non-combat unit in which Jewish men were forced to serve during the war, brings a cringing pain. We watch other members of the*

unit playfully pretend to beat up Béla Liebmann while one of your titles informs us that the Nazis shot one of his friends, Bandi Kardos, four years later.
I met the 96-year-old Béla Liebmann in 1996; he was the sole surviving source of information on Petö's generation, and an extremely rich source at that.

The "innocent" events become tragic signs for us now, as we are wise to the past (we possess *historic* knowledge). The home movie offers advantages to the historian. We have a retrospective *power* toward the past while we feel a powerless angst or tension toward our own unpredictable future. The "played beating" became more than cruel reality later for the Jewish Labor Force unit members on the Soviet front. The imitated, playful brutality predicts the forthcoming sadism. The psychodrama of the "*would be"* is a predicament of hell. Keep smiling, it could be worse . . .

One of the most striking aspects of your style in this respect is the texture and density you wrest from relatively minor moments. Especially notable are "throwaway" transition shots such as the brief shot of a man lighting a cigarette in front of the Amsterdam train station in The Maelstrom. *We never see this man again, but the shot lingers in our minds, despite its apparent insignificance.*
My smoking man film fragment (archive collection fragment) is like a signifying note on the abstract patchwork surface of a film-time game.

It's an ephemeral moment, indifferent, innocent, and yet the man is also a poetic figure . . . unintentionally, spontaneously walking toward the camera. The extended seconds of a lighting ritual, the smoke, and the 1939 sign in the upper right part of the main railway station together. A moment—of a dramatic year that an average family filmmaker would not appreciate—but that a *nouvelle vague* filmmaker would some 20 years later. We know immediately what the date means, but the smoker does not foresee (in his local time) the historic time. Why can't we warn him and the others? This is a powerful motive and gives an uncomfortable feeling for the viewers.

It is like the suspense of a Hitchcock film. We know ahead of time that the innocent victim will fall into the hands of the killer. We want to warn her/him; watch out! And our palms are sweating. We can't help, and here—in my films—it anticipates real blood, real suffering, we always have that in mind even if we never see it in my films. Our feelings aren't like after a Hitchcock screening, when lighting a cigarette, we know it was (just) a play. . . . And, of course, the film hero never dies in fictions . . . even while playing death; on the contrary, the heroes of my films, if you learn they'll die, or have died already, you are deadly sure it's a real thing.

Your films use techniques of compilation—as filmmaker you shoot "nothing"—but do so to construct a view of the historical past that differs from so-called true historical narratives.
The home moviemakers shoot nothing, too, in the spirit of Sartre or Heidegger when they speak of the "*nothing."* Like the ephemeral, ambient, pastime nothingness of ordinary life and banalities. It is intriguing to see the tension/contrast between the important, exquisite, excellent, historical event horizon (visualized by newsreels, fictions, docs, reporters) on one side, and the nothingness of banalities on the other—private Hungary, Holland etc.

Your own voice is very prominent in an indirect way, not only in the editing, tinting, reframing, voice-over commentaries and titling but also in the music that Tibor Szemzö composes for all your films. Could you elaborate on how you and he work together?
I met Tibor in 1978, when a member of a minimal musical ensemble asked me to be narrator (*recitivo*) to a Frederic Rzewsky piece, "Coming Together" in English. Tibor was the founder of the Group 180 and I participated in different pieces for eight years. We performed together as well from 1983 to 1984 as a happening-performance duo, and the whole idea of found footage and minimal music grew out of several stage performances (tour cities: Frankfurt, Budapest, Vienna, Cologne, Amsterdam, The Hague, Linz . . .). As a result we had already a common experience and a "film-music language" when by accident I received a grant in 1988 to make *The Bartos Family* and the next three *Private Hungary* episodes.

From the first day of editing I use already-existing music (mainly Szemzö, then Glass, Eno, or Monteverdi) to search and edit the silent cinema's rhythm and subconscious. This first round choice is a tool and finally it becomes, after quoting and altering, a part of the collage. It offers guidance, like a street sign. Then Tibor enters into the project after I have a good rough cut; the structure and "melody" of the movie is there. The music street signs—integrated with the sound effects—express the *attitude* of the work in progress and provide guidelines for Tibor. He first creates sound models to accompany the image. After readjusting with the piece I can change the corpus, the dynamics. So we develop the image and music in a permanent interaction, and we continue this way until we are satisfied.

You provide incendiary hints of location and context that could subsume the particular in the general, in a historical narrative, and reduce it to illustration or example, but you refuse to complete this gesture by spelling out a general history or by drawing a history lesson. This reduction is what I experience in most historical reenactments like Schindler's List. *In a reenactment like Spielberg's, every moment and every camera angle onto every moment serve to advance the narrative with the optimal degree of thematic resonance, character development and suspense. The impression of authenticity, which persists with the delicacy of a butterfly wing in your films, evaporates into drama and allegory.*

I have very little to say on *Schindler's List* as we find ourselves in the quagmire of the attribution of meanings. This is a private comment for our discourse: for different reasons, it's better if I am quiet about that film, to not hurt the victims' memory and cause suffering to those who might have a sentimental approach to the Holocaust.

The sentimental attitude is a resistance to the unbearable reality. Let us use the remarkable representations of Primo Levi, Jean Amery, Tadeusz Borowski or Imre Kertész for our comparison. Immediately it becomes clear to us that the *sentimental,* happy-ending, industrial, trivial but successful approach covers with tears the dry fact of the existence of the inconceivable. In film our yardstick should be *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et Brouillard,* 1956) by Alain Resnais and *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzman. To me the holocaust-film industry, shoa-kit-interviews are dreadful examples, and most of these films are on the other side of the river. This goes back to the function and attribution of *meaning* in my films. A "normal" filmmaker does not like scratchy, decomposed, "meaningless," amateur pictures (=bad). If *they* use archive footage at all it must be—with rare exceptions—crisp and clear to *illustrate* a fact, a place, a person. Even when a doc displays a character as an illustration of his/her suffering they still *illustrate* themselves. We may presume they are *really* a self, an historical individual, but no, they are just imitating themselves. And in amateur films, although individuals play themselves, the mistakes, the "bad" images somehow relieve them from the scheme. So the signifier self—the self as illustration or generalization—is not a real person but a replacement for one. In *Schindler's List* the red-coated little girl in the Krakow ghetto *plays for the coat*. The girl herself is there to illustrate a metaphor. In my films, *The Bartos Family,* for example, I'd say Mr. Bartos is a concrete Bartos for family use (in terms of the footage as home movies), on the one hand, and, for us, he represents a man who went through this and that in his own individual way without providing service as a symbol or metaphor, on the other hand. The story has a concrete and a substantial meaning at the same time.

Your interventions allow us to see the roles in which we are cast whether we are aware of them or not. Individuals portray themselves in their home movies as they think they are or as they wish to be seen, but you complicate this representation by suggesting how others see the same individuals, often in the most instrumental and dehumanizing of ways.

A Bartos is not playing a Bartos, but eventually he/she will become a Bartos, and perform different roles in his/her own life script according to the different situations and scenes. The role of the citizen and the *citoyen* are, eventually, parts of a larger frame of roles we act. We are sons/daughters of our parents ("till the end") and lovers/fathers, later grandfathers/grandmothers, and by social strata we are employers and employees, the voter, the consumer, the lover, the man/woman of secrets and dreams. . . . These are all roles and we transform through one single day from one to another. The Bartos life script, like that of the other families in the other films, offers much more than an average home movie. It is a detailed and varied account of times and spaces in the roaring twenties and thirties in Hungary, the matrix of private and public histories.

When you began assembling these films and working with the survivors of the filmmakers, what prompted you to refrain from making use of their own commentaries or those of family friends in the films themselves? What led you to use speaking or singing voices largely as a way to reiterate, verbatim, the anti-Semitic laws that were enacted by the Nazi regime?

I want to keep a minimalist attitude throughout the piece. I want the vision, the message on all its levels and in its appeal to all the senses, to move you, along with the music, text and image as well. Too many readings (subtitles) would ruin the fluxus, the whole float. In the editing process I position the subtitles and intertitles, I put them in and take them out, try a thousand times, then show it to others (friends, advisers, the *virgin* eyes) and listen to their reactions: the Trial and Error game.

Barbarism exists at the boundary between brute, physical occurrences and plotted, historical events. It appears beyond the pale of comprehension, beyond the

realm of socially acceptable practice. This is the alibi we adopt to drive it from our midst. And yet if the barbaric is the work of others like us, if it belongs to the historical record rather than to occurrences of nature, we need the means—the voice, the form, the ethical stance—to represent it as a (dark, abominable) aspect of our own history rather than as a calamity outside of it. Your personal perspective provides such means. Despite the arguments of some that the recognition of such a voice detracts from our attention to the raw historical facts themselves, this personal sense of authorship, and style, seems absolutely vital if barbarism is to have a human face.[3]

On the larger scale of our present time interests and needs, is our motive to decipher the films of a private past our historical sentiment? What is behind the background of our motives, *our* historical drama of the time-tour? Does the Historical-Archeological substratum reveal itself for today's viewer only, or will it show *other* meanings for other ages? Will other viewers decode the historical relevance by different signifiers, with or without sentiments like ours?

You do not seem intent on demonizing Seyss-Inquart or Eichmann, who did so much in the final year of the war to transport Hungarian Jews to their deaths, although their actions clearly attest to an unspeakable, unfathomable moral blankness within. Hatred for the barbarism of Nazis such as these is certainly deserved, but I want to ask you if forgiveness is also possible, or important, for you. Jacques Derrida has made the bold argument that forgiveness need not depend on a request for forgiveness, on an act of contrition, that forgiveness only fulfills its radical purpose when it forgives the unforgivable.[4] *In doing so, forgiveness carries us beyond revenge and beyond the realm of Law into an utterly different domain. Does forgiving serve to move us beyond the Law and the duty it has to the preservation of the State? Is it something needed by the forgiver as much as by those forgiven?*

Creating, comparing the incomparable duet of the German-Jewish exodus in *The Danube Exodus* was revelatory for me. I found myself contrasting the Bessarabian German refugees' saga (indeed, many of them were later recruited to the Wehrmacht) with the happy Jews destined for Palestine dancing on the ship. Altogether it was a constant inner struggle for me. I was learning the acceptance of civil sufferings, "even" if it was German suffering. Although the story of the German refugees allowed me to use a different light on this historical moment, the two stories mutually reflect and contextualize each other. So the Germans' sufferings and their forced exodus from Bessarabia underline the impossibilities of all inhuman atrocities. This saga invites non-selective forgiveness. For many years revenge justified the idea of hell for all Germans, but it's clear now: in human rights questions there aren't differences of value among nationalities and races of man.

The personal quality of your films, like the personal quality of the home movies on which they are based, turn us toward the authorial self. Roland Barthes, Hayden White and others have stressed the centrality of a different, intransitive or "middle" voice. This form of representation "becomes itself the means of vision or comprehension . . . a doing or making rather than a reflection or description."[5] *"The subject is constituted as immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it."*[6] *In other words, the author, and viewer, is put at risk. We encounter an order of experience that possesses transformative power.*

My emphasis is basically to guide you through—not only intellectually but also emotionally. Therefore, the meticulous but short selections from frustratingly lengthy laws and decrees are "for your sake." To give enough time for the meditation over and over again, the subtitles are all part of the complex *palette* that "grabs your guts" and maybe the second time you discover another, until then invisible layer. And yes, I can say this staccato mode of information, this lack, black hole, the info blackouts function as in certain opera (*Lulu,* Bob Ashley's video opera *Perfect Lives* or the Phillip Glass-Bob Wilson *Einstein on the Beach*), contrapuntally, yes. . . .

As collage-like structures with musical forms, your films evidence a work of representation that refuses the realist conventions of classic modes of historical discourse. Realism provides no sanctuary; narrative offers no closure; characters achieve no resolution; they leave "the end" unstated and unachieved. That element of the story remains up to us. Are these films not a way for us to encounter the past with an intensified sense of the profundity of loss—both at the hands of the Nazis and, later, at the hands of the Soviets—but also with a restored sense of perspective? Can you say what aspects of that restored perspective seem most crucial to you?

The "banality of evil," as Hannah Arendt put it, is a very important feature for our times in light of xenophobia on one hand and the *commercial Shoah representation* on the other. The good father, the loving husband, the horse-riding gentleman, the best grandfather—the mild, vegetarian, puritan Austrian petit

bourgeois (Seyss-Inquart)—is a cold breath near our neck. We can almost touch him and his *liebe Frau und so weiter* . . . so it helps us to imagine—feel—the Beast as a person, as a "human" Being. It helps to understand (appreciate) the parallel stories of the Seyss-Inquarts and the Peerebooms, with different life finales for Seyss-Inquart's little Gundel and the Peereboom's little Flora and Jacques-Franklin, who was named after Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

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Notes

The dialogue transcribed here is a result of an extended correspondence between Péter Forgács and myself. It began in Los Angeles in 1999 when I was a Scholar Associate at the Getty Research Institute and Péter Forgács presented some of his work at the UCLA Documentary Film Salon of Marina Goldovskaya, a distinguished filmmaker who teaches on the faculty. It continued when I returned to San Francisco and Péter took up residence as a Fellow at the Getty in 2000-2001 and came to a conclusion in correspondence between Hungary and the United States from summer 2001 to winter 2002. I am grateful for the stimulation to pursue some of these points that Steve Seid's essay in *Release Print* provided as well as the discussion among Péter Forgács, Michael Roth, President of the California College of Arts and Crafts and former Associate Director of the Getty Research Institute, and Michael Renov, Professor of Critical Studies in the School of Cinema and Television at U.S.C., and myself at the Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, April 21, 2001.

1. Panel discussion at the Skirball Cultural Center.
2. Seyss-Inquart was executed as a war criminal at the conclusion of the war.
3. Beryl Lang makes this argument, for example, in an essay on the representation of the Holocaust. It is a variation on the dictum attributed to Adorno that after the Holocaust, representation is impossible. Any sense of style or voice can only work to contain or compete with the abominable audacity of the actual facts and deeds of the case. Since Forgács does not address the Holocaust directly, he might claim an exemption, but Lang's argument—directed entirely at written accounts—stresses the location of the author in a post-Holocaust environment that would seem to make the representation of Jewish life and culture in a pre-Holocaust moment equally open to criticism. I clearly do not agree with Lang. Forgács finds a way to do with moving images what Lang does not find well exemplified in written accounts: the value of the chronicle over the narrative and of silence over representation. That Forgács utilizes qualities of both the chronicle and of silence, poetically and to historical effect, is a tribute to his own, remarkable probing of the limits of representation. See Beryl Lang, "The Representation of Limits," in Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
4. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).
5. Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in *Probing the Limits of Representation,* p. 48.
6. White, p. 49.

Abstract How can home movies from Europe originally shot in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, become testimony to an entire way of life destroyed by war, Communism, and the politics of genocide? An interview with Péter Forgács about his astonishing compilation films explores the private history of peoples and nations "from below" and reveals the tone and texture of lives that perished or prevailed during decades of extraordinary tumult.

Our New Book Review Editor

We are very happy to announce that Matthew Bernstein, Associate Professor of Film Studies at Emory University, has been chosen as the new Book Review Editor for *Film Quarterly*. Bernstein is a longtime contributor to *FQ* and other scholarly film journals, including *Film Criticism, Film History, Griffithiana, The Journal of Film and Video, Post Script, The Velvet Light Trap,* and *Wide Angle*. His most recent publications include the anthologies *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (1999) and *John Ford Made Westerns: Filming the Legend in the Sound Era* (2001), as well as a reprint of his *Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent* (2000). He is currently co-authoring a history of film culture in Atlanta across the color line. Reach him at mbernst@emory.edu if you are interested in writing book reviews for *FQ*.

Kelly Kessler

Bound Together

Lesbian Film That's Family Fun for Everyone

Before the 1990s, lesbian-focused films were few and far between. The available object choices for lesbians tended to be either vampire lesbians such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) or the more recent and now iconic Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger* (1983), "arty" lesbians such as those in *Entre Nous* (1983), better-off-dead lesbians such as Sandy Dennis in *The Fox* (1968), or the "now I'm a lesbian, now I'm not" type in films such as *Personal Best* (1982). Very few films contained a lesbian love story in which the relationship was overt and intact at the end of the film.

The 1990s, on the other hand, brought an onslaught of films whose narratives focused on lesbian relationships, sometimes even happy ones at that. In surveying lesbian films made since the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall, the supposed kick-off to gay and lesbian independence, I discovered that the majority of lesbian-couple-focused films directed by men still contained murdering or violent lesbians (i.e. *Heavenly Creatures* [1994], *Bound* [1996], *Fun* [1994], and *Butterfly Kiss* [1995]). While female directors are churning out films such as *Late Bloomers* (1996), *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), and *It's in the Water* (1998), and presenting previously missing images of lesbian love (minus death and indecisiveness), men appear to continue a focus on lesbians as deviant threats to the social order.

In defiance, I wanted to condemn the entire subgenre of lesbian couples that kill as a sign of male fear, insecurity, and libido. However, within this category of killing couples, I could not come to terms with one film, *Bound*. Despite my efforts to convince myself otherwise, the Larry and Andy Wachowski dyke mob thriller still stands out as "family fun for everyone." I do not deny that it provides images to titillate heterosexual men, but at the same time I believe that it

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creates much needed empowering and erotic images for lesbians. I will examine here how directors/writers Andy and Larry Wachowski accomplish this pansexual attraction when others have either failed or simply made no attempt to do so. I will look at how the filmmakers create images that are at once empowering to lesbians yet titillating to heterosexual men, without threatening the heterosexual order (too much). Why isn't *Bound* a tremendous threat? Why is *Bound* "family fun for everyone?"

I will examine the film with regard to three main questions. First, how does *Bound*'s vision of the female body and lesbian sex lend itself to both heterosexual male and lesbian desire? Second, how can the film's depiction of lesbian stereotypes be read on both the levels of empowerment and trivialization/marginalization/exoticization? Third, how does the film use parody or caricature of gangsters to produce humor and alleviate the severity of the lesbian threat?

Vamps and Tramps

Before addressing the film, I would like to briefly foreground the major strains of existing discourse surrounding violent portrayals of lesbians and their impact on the viewer. One question addressed in the existing dialogue is whether or not these images are emotionally and culturally damaging to lesbians. Scholars' opinions regarding the effects of such filmed portrayals of violent lesbians are split into two camps which break down into the basic categories of empowerment and marginalization. Scholars such as Chris Holmlund, Andrea Weiss, Lynda Hart, and Linda Ruth Williams each point to ways in which violent depictions of lesbians empower the heterosexual viewer while marginalizing the lesbian viewer, including equating female sexual agency with deserved heterosexual-on-lesbian violence, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and reaffirming the patriarchal order while providing sexual pleasure for the heterosexual male viewer.[1] Alternately, Clare Whatling and Judith Halberstam have both identified methods of lesbian and/or female empowerment in images of sociopathic lesbians, focusing on the power of the "nostalgia of abjection" and lesbian-on-heterosexual male imagined violence.[2] However, I see the crossover effect identified in Linda Ruth Williams's work on the erotic thriller as most relevant to explaining the cross-market success of *Bound*. Studying the Hollywood blockbuster and straight-to-video erotic thrillers, Williams contends that the latter provide more space for lesbian/female identification. While the women are engaging in activities that are heterosexually tailored, described as "the pleasures of shopping with the pleasures of sex in an atmosphere that is part Tupperware party, part orgy," the male is totally absent from the mise-en-scène, and the dialogue is anti-male. Also, the straight-to-video movie provides more frequent occasions of female bonding and lesbian sex that go unpunished. Though the heterosexual male spectator may be enjoying the view, the female or lesbian spectator may embody the more powerful subject position.[3]

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In many ways *Bound* followed suit with other contemporary erotic thrillers. Mingling sex and violence while accomplishing a near-noir feel, *Bound*'s narrative centers on the steamy affair of and mob double-cross by femme Violet (Jennifer Tilly) and butch ex-con Corky (Gina Gershon). Despite the negative press many lesbian so-called thrillers receive from the lesbian community, *Bound* received raves, as well as being praised by the straight/mainstream press. One reporter noting the film's wide appeal wrote:

> Larry and Andy Wachowski, co-screenwriters and first-time co-directors have covered their bases, genrewise. This clever, eye-catching, highly stylized, faux-chic caper features: (a) Coen brothers-style gore; (b) Scorsese-style mob double-crossings; (c) Candida Royale-style erotica; (d) Joe Eszterhas-style lesbians. Schwing![4]

Thus there were three main characteristics that allowed *Bound* to draw favor from both heterosexual and lesbian crowds: (1) images of desire that work for both lesbian and heterosexual viewers, (2) strategic use of stereotypes, and (3) camp or parody of the prototypical Hollywood gangster.

Girl-on-Girl Action: Balanced Images of Desire

Though lesbian sex has long been a part of straight pornography, both pornographic films and their mainstream clones often fail to depict lesbian sex so that it appeals to both straight and lesbian audiences.[5] The images used in heterosexual pornography, such as those replicated in *Basic Instinct,* of hyper-feminine women with long hair, long nails, and a man waiting close by, are not necessarily the same images that attract lesbian viewers. However, images in previous les-

The butch/femme aesthetic in *Bound*

bian films such as *Desert Hearts* (1995) have been accused of being too soft, fuzzy, and romantic, or "vanilla," to satisfy either heterosexual male or lesbian audiences. Not only is the sex act somewhat sanitized, but the participants do not fit a heterosexual "lesbian fantasy." *Bound* avoids a formal exclusion of either audience by nodding toward conventions of both straight and lesbian pornography/erotica with a more explicit approach to sex which includes more graphic lesbian sex coupled with less graphic moments of eroticism and definite lesbian coding (different from that in heterosexual pornography). One recognized catalyst for this approach was the participation in the film of Susie Bright, the self-proclaimed "sexpert" and editor of the lesbian erotica magazine *On Our Backs*.

The Wachowskis originally approached Bright for a simple cameo; however, her responses to their script led them to hire her as the film's sexual consultant. Bright described the original script as having suffered the same ailment as other lesbian films. In other words, whenever the script approached a sex scene, it simply faded into the next scene.[6] She warned the Wachowskis that if they proceeded as planned they might find themselves with many disappointed lesbians on their hands. Bright's input was ultimately responsible for what the script finally referred to as "sweaty, slippery, body-grinding, bed-squeaking lesbian sex."[7] Indeed, the two sex scenes in the film were shot in such a way that they would appeal to a heterosexual male audience, while providing "steamy" lesbian sex, targeted at lesbians. This was accomplished by a combination of the images produced and the actresses involved.

The scenes that depict actual sexual contact between the two main characters, Corky and Violet, have a strong voyeuristic feel. A number of medium shots have both characters in the frame. The camera is more often objectively looking in on the action rather than encouraging a specific point of identification by reporting from the point of view of any given character. The first of two significant sex scenes takes place in the upscale condominium apartment Violet shares with her mobster boyfriend. Violet, visually coded as the femme member of the duo, has lured Corky, the butch fix-it dyke, to her apartment to retrieve a conveniently misplaced earring from the kitchen pipes. Corky and Violet had previously met while exchanging burning glances over a cup of coffee and scoping each other out in the elevator. In this scene (hereafter referred to as the plumbing scene), after many smoldering looks and a very steamy slow motion pipe unscrewing, Violet makes Corky aware of the fact that she is interested in more than just plumbing. As a kind of proof of her true lesbianism and state of arousal (Corky is wary of the sincerity of the femme Violet), Violet puts Corky's hand under her dress to confirm her intentions. Here the film uses strategies of heterosexual pornography and lesbian erotica to draw in both audiences. Like much heterosexual pornography, *Bound* heavily fetishizes bodies with constant close-ups of specific body parts: lips, the flexing forearm (the hand of which has disappeared under the skirt), heaving cleavage, bare legs, and fingernails. However, at the same time that *Bound* dismembers the female body in a fetishistic display for the viewer, it also turns away from standard conventions of pornography.

The scene avoids phallocentrism, in that it focuses on the expressions of pleasure on Violet's face and her shallow gasps of sexual arousal rather than penetration or even actual genitalia. The scene was mostly filmed in medium shot with both actresses in the frame

The second sex scene, with the femme Violet in control

or in close-up of segmented body parts. Instead of encouraging the heterosexual male viewer to identify with one of the women, he is able to view the scenes in a similar fashion as he would pornography: both lesbians in frame with a focus on specific body parts. At the same time, the scene progresses rendering same sex identification and eroticism easily accessible. Unlike many straight-oriented lesbian-themed films, the lesbian spectator is allowed to view a steamy scene between two women without the disturbance of a man joining in or the distraction of worrying about whether or not the lesbian's long fingernails are going to cause a problem (it is Corky's nicely clipped fingernails that are in action, not Violet's).[8] The lesbian press described the scene as "one of the most sexy and surprisingly authentic lesbian love scenes on celluloid."[9]

The second and more visually explicit sex scene again takes advantage of both heterosexual and lesbian conventions. Like the previous encounter, it has a voyeuristic feel. The scene takes place in Corky's rundown apartment, again putting focus on the difference between the neat, feminine Violet and the tough, scruffy, ex-con, butch Corky. Violet is "repaying" Corky for the favor done her in the plumbing scene. As the scene begins, we come upon the two already in action. From the head of the bed we see that both are naked. Corky and Violet are writhing on a bare mattress on the floor of the apartment. The sex scene continues in one uninterrupted shot that starts as a long shot from the head of the mattress, closing in on one side of their bodies which are just shielding Violet's hands between Corky's legs, running down the length of Violet's body to focus in on Corky's orgasmically curling toes, going up Corky's body to reveal her many hidden tattoos, and finally resting on Corky's face which is covered by Violet's Chanel Vamp colored fingernails as she twitches in orgasm.[10]

Again, I would argue the shot does not force one single type of visual identification since it affords the spectator a voyeuristic pleasure which allows him/her to gauge the scene from various vantage points to satisfy different tastes. It further invites the spectator to act as a voyeur or, by following the action in one fluid shot and changing the closeness, to focus on different body parts and levels of pleasure. It also allows the spectator to relate to the scene as an active third participant.[11] However, unlike ménage à trois in heterosexual male pornography, it excludes phallocentrism, providing for inclusion of non-phallocentric lesbian viewers. Indeed, many reviews refer to it as the hottest lesbian sex scene shown on film. This scene presents a type of lesbian sexuality that is not often shown in heterosexual films: lesbian sex without the need of any phallic object. It provides sex totally independent of male symbolism. Thus, the scene is not heterosexualized, and the women are not wearing sexy teddies and they do not look like they are playing slumber party games. It is simply hot, passionate sex with all of the sweat and grind often missing from male pornography, in which the lesbian sex is usually just a precursor to the "real" heterosexual sex. Thus, *Bound* portrays the intimacies and technicalities of lesbian sex without the fuzzy romanticism of other lesbian love scenes or the hyper-feminine trashiness of heterosexual pornography.

In addition to the visual choices made in portraying sexual acts in the film, the actresses involved in *Bound* possessed "crossover appeal." Mainstream films often alienate lesbian viewers by presenting heterosexualized lesbians designed to fulfill a male fantasy, while lesbian films such as *Late Bloomers* go the oppo-

site route. By depicting lesbians as ordinary, not classically beautiful or sexy people, some lesbian movies present women who in no way fit the standard male fantasy. *Bound,* on the other hand, utilizes lesbian visual coding as well as male fantasy to appeal to both audiences, and the actresses, Gina Gershon (Corky) and Jennifer Tilly (Violet), make concessions to both groups. Gershon and Tilly are both known for playing feminine characters: Gershon's bisexual Crystal in *Showgirls* (1995) and Tilly's bimbo Olive in *Bullets Over Broadway* (1994). Gershon and Tilly are also very attractive women who could be, and have been in the past, dressed up to fit a heterosexual ideal of beauty and eroticism. The characters of Violet and Corky, however, are very clearly representative of butch and femme roles, giving an ironic nod in recognition of the practices or codes of actual lesbian culture/history. *Basic Instinct* makes a weak attempt to do this by "butching up" the character of Roxy, but in the end she simply looks like a fantasy femme wearing a butch Halloween costume that had mistakenly come with stretch pants.

In *Bound,* Corky is decked out in all of the butch accoutrements, including leather jacket, boots, men's briefs, and tattoos. However, she is played by Gershon, an actress already understood by the audience as part of Hollywood lesbian chic without actually being identified as an off-screen lesbian. Gershon's name on a lesbian bill automatically conjures up images of the Verhoeven/Eszterhas flop *Showgirls,* in which she plays a bisexual femme showgirl who dresses the part of the heterosexual, bejeweled-nipple dream gal while trying to put the make on one of the girls from the chorus line. One of the negative comments that *Bound* received from the gay press relates to Gershon's unbelievability as a butch.[12] In most cases, however, the reviewers thought that the great sex more than compensates for a little forced butchness. Tilly, as the femme Violet, easily fits into the heterosexual mold of beauty while still playing a lesbian foil to the butch Corky. She usually wears tight, short dresses that push her cleavage to the skies. Her wardrobe, along with her made-up face, long nails, and baby whisper of a voice make her desirable on various levels, lesbian and heterosexual.

This combination of actress choice and character construction helps to increase the chance of pleasing both audiences. The heterosexual male audience found "girl-on-girl action" with two very sexy Hollywood starlets while watching guns blasting and the rest of the macho action movie fare. The film simultaneously presents lesbians with lesbian-coded women partaking in believable, sexually charged, non-romanticized lesbian sex, with the added bonus of watching them out-smart and out-muscle the men.

Lipstick and Leather: Strategic Use of Stereotypes

The stereotypes in *Bound* function on several different levels, at once providing the opportunity to satisfy the needs of lesbians looking for images of empowerment, heterosexuals accepting of positive images of lesbians, and those simply looking to marginalize, trivialize, or exoticize lesbians. As mentioned previously, the characters of Corky and Violet are clearly coded as butch and femme. Though the visual coexistence of these two types does create an environment rife for criticism by a hostile heterosexual viewer, it also solidifies the visibility of the lesbian character and her sexuality.[13] Butch and femme categorizations as part of lesbian culture go back a number of decades. With visual clues illuminating sexual roles and expectations, the 1950s emergent lesbian subculture strictly followed and enforced the roles to aid members about how to be "in the know." In general, the butch was thought to be aggressive while the femme was perceived as passive. By the 1980s, the roles had become less strict (for some), and it was considered unhealthy to be trapped in the roles and rules that went along with them. However, today, the roles still exist as images of lesbian culture, both past and present.[14] *Bound* takes advantage of the fact that the roles of butch and femme are known and recognizable in both heterosexual and lesbian culture.

Stereotypes allow audience members to conjure up quickly an associative meaning and value system of the character in question so that they can then compare it with their own.[15] This ability to associate characters with or in comparison to oneself alleviates the discomfort caused by cultural uncertainty. Clint Wilson and Félix Gutiérrez describe several different phases that the media go through in depicting race, which, as I see it, are equally applicable to the representation of sexual orientation: exclusionary, threatening-issue, confrontation, stereotypical selection, and multiracial—or for our discussion here, pansexual.[16] The progression of lesbian film over the years illustrates the first four of these phases. I will focus on the third and fourth: confrontation and stereotypical selection.

The confrontation stage is identified by an overrepresentation of negative images of the subordinated group in order to promote fear and a sense of superiority in the dominant group. This can be illustrated by

the spate of mainstream films which reveal, confront, and squash the lesbian threat. At least from the 1960s to the 1990s, Hollywood presented lesbianism as a threat that needs to be addressed. Films from this period introduced lesbian plots, only to destroy the lesbian by the end of the film. This can be seen in such lesbian-themed films as *The Children's Hour* (1961) and *The Fox* (1968). Both represent lesbianism as a threat to the social order and ultimately the lesbians are killed (via suicide or falling phallic tree). The 1970s brought the aforementioned lesbian vampire films, and more recently, films such as *Basic Instinct* have continued the trend of lesbian annihilation.

I believe that *Bound* has taken a step forward into the stereotypical selection phase. This phase accomplishes two things: it reassures the general audience that the minority group is still subordinated and shows that those lesbians who escape their predestined station in life (persecution and marginalization) are not threats to society because (as exceptions to the lesbian "norm") they share the same values and ambitions as dominant/heterosexual society. *Bound* completes the task of reassurance in several ways. Portraying Corky and Violet through classic femme and butch images reinforces the lesbian stereotype, and thus shows them to be "in their place." The image and character of Corky satisfies this ideological task better than Violet. Violet as a femme can blend into heterosexual society with ease. Corky, conversely, as a classic butch is a recognizable and therefore an avoidable threat. She sports her leather jacket, men's underwear, and work boots, fits the prison girl stereotype, and works well with her hands (as in the plumbing scene). She is fully representative of the mannish female who is often thought of as lesbian. In an early scene, the film also represents Corky as being "in her place" by her presence in a lesbian bar which conjures up the "dark underworld" of lesbian subculture. The bar itself is dark and filled with mannish women coupled with cold-looking feminine women. Jesse (Susie Bright), the woman Corky approaches in the bar, is coded as femme, but frighteningly clad in leather S&M gear. The bar scene reifies Corky as part of a "seedy" subculture and reassures the viewer that lesbians are a different but recognizable breed.

The second task of the stereotypical selection phase is to assuage the audience's fear of the lesbian threat by showing successful lesbians as exceptions to the rule, who only persevere because they are outstanding in one way or another and share the same value system and ambitions as the dominant group. Corky and Violet, though seen as subverting the patriarchal system by their rejection of heterosexual romance for a lesbian affair, are also seen as supporting dominant ideology by their placement as the heroes in the film. Despite the fact that they steal two million dollars from Caesar and the mob and eventually kill him, they are still the most redeemable characters in the film. Why do they do what they do? They want to get out of "the business," and this double-cross is the only way that Violet thinks she can do it. The people they kill or put in a position to be killed (Caesar and the other mobsters) are not representative of dominant society, but of another subculture perhaps even more ideologically problematic than lesbians: the mafia. Throughout, the film encourages the viewer to root for Violet and Corky. Indeed, a narrative point of the film revolves around whether or not Corky and Violet can trust each other, which serves to address Caesar's accusation that "everyone knows [their] kind can't be trusted." They rise to the challenge. Corky and Violet are set up as the smartest and most trustworthy of the characters—attributes admired in heterosexual society. Consequently, if the viewer wants to identify with the lesbians or see Corky and Violet as redeeming characters, the film provides him/her with the material with which to do so. If s/he wants to look at them as deviant lesbians deserving of punishment, s/he can do that also by seeing them as nothing more than a couple of dykes who stole some money and who hopefully will be punished later. As an added bonus, s/he can revel in the fact that the heterosexual male landed a few good punches before they got the better of him.

On the flip side, these same stereotypes can also be used as a means of empowerment for lesbian viewers. Though the butch and femme roles may be seen as pejorative in dominant society, they are identifiable historical roles in the lesbian community and a symbol of pride. The film takes advantage of recognizable roles and locations, uses lesbian stereotypes as a source of collective humor, and utilizes extra-textual information to connect more closely with the lesbian community.

Despite the fact that Corky and Violet are aesthetically constructed in traditional butch and femme roles, their characters reflect cultural changes, tying them to the modern lesbian culture while still harking to the past. Though Corky, the butch, is the physically stronger and the more masculine, Violet is the intellectual superior and sexual aggressor. In both the plumbing scene and the bedroom scene, it is Violet who initiates the action. She places Corky's hand under her

The lesbian bar

dress and she goes to Corky's truck to prompt the second encounter. In the bedroom scene, it is Violet who is on top and controlling the sex while Corky is the passive receiver. *Bound* visually adheres to historical stereotypes while revising/transforming them through a reversal of behavior expectation and connotation.

The scene in the lesbian bar, The Watering Hole, can be re-read from a lesbian-friendly perspective. It places Corky in a recognizable lesbian environment and uses extra-textual information and "in" jokes to tie the film to lesbian culture. When Corky enters the bar, she steps up for a drink and strikes up a conversation with the bartender who knows of her checkered past. She makes it clear that she is there to find a warm body for the evening. As she walks the length of the dark room, the camera pans from face to face of butch women and couples. She happens upon Jesse, and after Corky is harassed by a policewoman, who is also patronizing the bar (and perhaps Jesse), the scene ends.

The bar scene places Corky in a recognizable environment. The Watering Hole possesses the dark atmosphere common in lesbian bars tucked away from the flashy lights of gay or straight dance clubs. Mainstream films such as *Basic Instinct* or *Living out Loud* (1998) place lesbians in glitzy clubs filled with heterosexual looking women who are implied to be lesbians, but designed to fit the stereotypical heterosexual male fantasy. The Watering Hole looks as if it could actually be a lesbian bar, and the patrons look like they would actually be in one.

This scene also includes Bright's cameo as the leather-clad Jesse. Her presence intertextually connects the film to actual lesbian culture and allows lesbian viewers to believe they are more fully experiencing the film by understanding the reference that would be lost on viewers who are not "in the know." The symbolic codes provide for an embracing of and participation with lesbian cultures. Not only does the film visually represent lesbian culture, but also it does so in such a way that privileges those who are familiar with all or part of it, establishing them as superior viewers.

Finally, the bar scene utilizes humor connected to lesbian images. The lesbians who are patronizing the bar are recognizable as lesbians, but they are also stereotypical to the point of humor. The scene shows each pair partnered up as if the bar enforces a boy/girl- or butch/femme-only policy and even includes the stereotypical dyke police officer frequenting the establishment. Referencing popular culture, Corky makes an intertextual allusion to "Cagney and Lacey" (when stepping away from Jesse and the policewoman, she says, "when you're finished playing 'Cagney and Lacey,' find me"), a television series that was often considered homoerotic.[17]

Throughout, the film uses humor as a method of empowerment to the lesbian viewer. Jokes are made regarding lesbian stereotypes that can provide a kind of reflexive humor for those immersed in the subculture. On two occasions Violet asks Corky questions and replies with "of course" because the answers, like Corky, match the stereotypical lesbian.

Violet: I bet your car is 20 years old.

Corky: Truck.

Violet: Truck . . . of course.

and

The Hollywood-style gangsters

Violet: What would you like?

Corky: Beer.

Violet: Beer . . . of course.

A similar sense of humorous irony exists in Corky's attire, knowing sneers, and brand new getaway truck. Simultaneously these verbal interchanges and visual signifiers invite the lesbian to see and laugh at herself and her community.

Shut up, Shuttin' up: Gangster Humor

A third way in which *Bound* lends itself to a wide appeal is through its parodying of the gangster genre characters. By bringing humor to a traditionally male genre, the film maximizes its appeal. Humor also helps to alleviate tension; the lesbian threat cannot be taken quite so seriously when the plot itself leans to the parodic. Through extremely stylized acting and an air of reflexivity, *Bound* provides a humorous caricature of gangsters. Clearly intended to fit into the mobster mold, the gangsters all sound like the hoods in *Some Like It Hot* (1959). Reviewers referred to Joe Pantoliano (Caesar) "as playing the quintessential low-life gangster," "as knowing his Scorsese," and as being quite funny.[18]

Throughout the film Caesar, the godfather Gino Marzzone, his son Johnny, and the head of Caesar's gang Mickey deliver lines that cannot help but send the viewer's mind reeling to past gangster images, whether they be Bugs Bunny's Mugsy, *The Godfather*'s (1972) Marlon Brando, or *Little Caesar*'s (1930) Edward G. Robinson. The viewer easily recognizes the type with or without having actually viewed any of the historical sources. Hollywood typically portrays gangsters as violent, erratic, not necessarily too bright, and possessing poor grammar and garbled diction. Throughout the film, lines such as the following repeatedly undermine the gangsters' assumed threat.

Caesar: Christ, Mick! You scared the shit out o' me. Wat 'er you guys doin' there with yer peckers in yer hands? Ya gonna do me Mickey? Is dat it?

Or

Mickey: I was buzzin', I was knockin', but I guess you couldn't hear me on account a bein' in da shower.

Caesar: Ya, well . . . you know Mick. I'm all wound up. I'm drivin' myself crazy over dis Gino ting and well . . . Vi . . . you know . . . she thought, maybe . . . she could . . . you know . . . relax me in da . . .

Mickey: Dat Violet is one nice lady. Wish someone would help me relax.

Or

Caesar: My name is Caesar and dis here is my Vi'let.

The mobsters are obviously constructed as stooges. From Johnny's shiny colored suits to Gino's knock-off Brando (robust figure, mushed speech, chubby cheeks and all), the film continually makes humorous citations to the mobsters of yore. The stylized acting and stereotypical dialogue allow the viewer an out, permitting him/her to perceive the film as a kind of black comedy or parody, thereby undermining any diegetic lesbian threat.

Okay, Even Straight Men Can Do It

Along with the proliferation of lesbian-subject films in the 1990s has come the argument that only lesbians should be allowed to produce films with negative images of lesbians, and for heterosexual Hollywood to do the same would simply be an act of oppression.[19] Though this argument can be supported by looking at examples, both older and more recent, *Bound* takes the image of the violent lesbian in another direction. The Wachowski brothers, who refer to themselves as the "married, heterosexual brothers from the Midwest," succeed in producing a film that escapes the idealized or politically correct lesbian image while still presenting a strong and empowering one.[20] As Williams has previously stated when discussing the straight-to-video erotic thrillers, films that present a balanced mix of imagery have a better chance to appeal to various groups. *Bound* finds this balance. With its mixture of heterosexual and lesbian imagery, coding, and humor, the film opens itself up to titillate and entertain people of varying tastes. It provides a frame of reference for viewers, utilizing stereotypes that provide a space for communal identification for lesbians and an ideological framework for the heterosexual viewer. With its broad stereotypes, it provides a point of visibility and recognition for the often ignored or subordinated lesbian viewer. Though it may not have reached Wilson and Gutiérrez's final phase of multiracial or pansexual coverage, it does take a further step forward by not presenting only destructive images of lesbians. Concurrently, to avoid alienating or frightening the viewers of the dominant group (without the support of whom financial success would be unlikely) it produces strong images of women/lesbians in a world that can be viewed as somewhat farcical due to the incompetence and ridiculousness of the male characters. While subverting the patriarchal system by providing for empowering images of lesbians, it also provides space for alternative readings. Why can't I demonize *Bound*? Where other erotic thrillers have failed and lesbian dramas have paled, *Bound* finds a place of enjoyment for a range of viewers. *Bound* is "family fun for everyone."

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Notes

1. Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 123; Chris Holmlund, "Cruisin' for a Bruisin': Hollywood's Deadly (Lesbian) Dolls," *Cinema Journal* 1994: 31-51; Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 87-89; Linda Ruth Williams, "Erotic Thrillers and Rude Women," *Sight and Sound* July 1993: 12-14.
2. Clare Whatling, *Screen Dreams: Fantasizing Lesbians in Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 82. Judith Halberstam, "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence: Representation, Rage and Resistance," *Social Text* 1993: 187-201.
3. Williams, "Erotic Thrillers and Rude Women" 13.
4. Lisa Schwarzbaum, "Girlie Movie," *Entertainment Weekly* 11 October 1996: 72.
5. Stephen Ziplow's 1977 *A Filmmaker's Guide to Pornography* lists lesbian sex as one of several acts that should be included in a pornographic film and states that "it is a major turn-on to a larger portion of your heterosexual audience." Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy" of the Visible* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 128.
6. Chastity Bono, "Boundless," *The Advocate* 12 November: 65.
7. Alan Frutkin, "Bonnie and Bonnie," *The Advocate* 5 September 1995: 56.
8. Mandy Merck's "The Lesbian Hand" investigates the historical implications of the hand in lesbian erotic, literary, and visual culture. Directing her findings onto the text of *Bound,* she discusses the hand's ramifications in terms of its sexual (possibly vanilla) connotation in contemporary lesbian sexology, position as phallic stand-in or fetish, and symbol of an honorable bond. Like Merck, I resist wholly equating the sexually active hand to phallus or fetish, rather, in the case of *Bound,* it stands as a corporal entity which can demonstrate "what [lesbians] do." While maintaining the closeness of actual bodily contact and avoiding overt phallic stand-ins, sexual manipulation via the hand allows a visual and highly mobile means to sexual gratification. Unlike the other phallic stand-ins Merck cites in Judith Butler's laundry list of possible locales for the lesbian phallus (knee, thigh, arm, pelvic bone, tongue), the ultra-cinematic hand can manipulate and be manipulated by means other than mere friction, providing a more visually active performance of lesbian sex as it continuously maneuvers its digits, disappears under a dress or between legs, or reappears in the satiated lover's mouth. Mandy Merck, "The Lesbian Hand" in *In Your Face* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000).
9. Judith Halberstam, "Gangster Dyke," *Girlfriends* January/February 1997: 14.
10. This description is based on the theatrical release and the 1997 VHS release. The later released DVD includes a few additional seconds of slightly more graphic action. Violet's nail polish color is courtesy of *Bound*: The 100% Unofficial Website, 26 April 1999 http://www.mindspring.com/~moomoo/Bound/index.html

11. Ménage à trois satisfies another of Stephen Ziplow's acts to be included in pornography (Williams, *Hard,* 128).
12. Frutkin, "Bonnie and Bonnie," 56; Halberstam, "Gangster Dyke," 14.
13. Various theorists argue that rendering invisible the butch, an image so historically ingrained in lesbian culture, aids in veiling the lesbian herself. Chris Holmlund addresses the proliferation of femme images in film, stating that "Admittedly the femme's lesbianism is most visible when she is in the arms of her lover . . . For most observers, the assumption of heterosexuality is so strong that the femme is easily seen as just another woman's friend." Similarly, Sue Ellen Case examines the shifting status of butch-femme roles in lieu of the 1970s feminist movement. Finding the butch subject position restrictive, the movement party line often encouraged the abolition of such dualistic roles in favor of more "socially-sanctioned" images of womanhood. The coexistence of the butch and femme in films such as *Bound* thrusts these roles out of the closet and back into the forefront, demanding the lesbian's presence and otherness. Sue Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" in *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 295-297. Christine Holmlund, "When Is a Lesbian Not a Lesbian? The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film," *Camera Obscura* 24 (1990) 148.
14. Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (New York: Penguin, 1991) 170, 266.
15. Clint Wilson and Félix Gutiérrez, *Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media* (Thousand Oaks and London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995) 61.
16. Wilson, 150-158.
17. See Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney and Lacey,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
18. Richard James Havis, "Women on the Edge," *South China Morning Post* 1 December 1996: 7; Jeff Strickler, "Thanks to Tilly, Noir Fans are Bound to Enjoy Thriller," *Star Tribune* 5 October 1996: 4E.
19. Ruth Picardie, "Mad, Bad, and Dangerous: Gay Filmmakers and Gay Opposition to the Film *Basic Instinct*," "New Statesman & Society," 1 May 1992: 36.
20. Janet Maslin, "Girl Meets Girl, Dumps Boy," *New York Times* 4 October 1996: Sec. C, 22.

Abstract While many recent male-directed lesbian-couple-focused films contain murdering or violent lesbians, the dyke mob thriller *Bound* stands apart. This study analyzes the film in terms of three issues—the presentation of the female body and lesbian sex, stereotyping, and a caricature of the gangster genre—and shows how *Bound* avoids selling out to or alienating the mass audience while successfully providing a needed space for polyvalent identification and pleasure.

Ned Schantz

Telephonic Film

Narrative film loves the telephone—and not just the usual suspects like *Dial M for Murder, Pillow Talk,* or *When a Stranger Calls,* but films that may not advertise their phones: *The Big Sleep, It's a Wonderful Life, Chinatown*. As our favorite way into the homes and offices of fictional characters, the telephone serves novelistic interest, affirming that individuals are indeed worth watching. Our gossipy desire to know becomes a desire for the phone to ring, or to place a call ourselves. And the phone accommodates an old and deep cinematic desire to be in two or more places at once, to transcend the limits of our individuality.[1] We might indeed ask then if the phone is not to the cinema what the letter is to the novel: the vehicle for the incorporation of multiple positions from which to narrate—the somewhat wobbly vehicle that, in its inherent vulnerability to interception, delay, misunderstanding, or disguise, dependably delivers the conditions of instability that make narrative possible.[2]

In exchange, film gives the phone eyes, transporting our vision to the other end of the line. Consider how rarely in film we share the limited vision of a character on the phone, and how often we see what that character cannot. But this visual supplement ultimately does the phone no favors, for it subjects the claims of the voice to a visual verification that could at any moment decide that the phone is not to be trusted, while reserving for the camera the authority to verify. In this respect telephonic film is less like the fully epistolary novel of the eighteenth century (for which the exact analogy might be a telephonic radioplay such as Lucille Fletcher's *Sorry, Wrong Number,* where all narrative

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information comes through the phone) and more like the nineteenth-century novel, with its occasional letters embedded in a larger narration capable of supervision and correction.

But it remains useful to remember the letter's literary importance if we are not simply to take the presence of phones in the movies for granted as the modish furniture of the modern world, as simply one object among many in the careful composition of mise-en-scène. Of course the filmic phone has not gone entirely unnoticed, but critics have perhaps been too quick to assimilate it into larger theories of the cinema. Two studies in particular deserve mention: Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema* and Tom Gunning's "Heard Over the Phone: *The Lonely Villa* and the de Lorde Tradition of the Terrors of Technology." Gunning perceptively contrasts D.W. Griffith's film about the rescue of a besieged family with its darker antecedents in French theatre, unfolding a rich spectrum of narrative effects as the telephone either tortures the absent father with the dying voices of his family, or calls him home in the nick of time. By the end of the essay, however, Gunning has scattered these telephonic issues in a more general field: the phone serves as an emblem for all modern technology, while the viewer of early narrative film becomes "a switchboard operator of narrative messages."[3] Chion, meanwhile, begins what he calls "a typology of telephonic figures in film," considering the various possibilities of what the viewer can see and hear of a filmed phone conversation, only to abandon the analysis as merely amusing.[4] What really interests him is the "relationship between the vocal connection, umbilical cords, and telephone cords," and so the complexity of his typology collapses into a model of regressive telephony.[5] All of these ideas are highly suggestive. After all, to be a switchboard operator is, against the expectations of much film theory, to be a woman, and we are reminded of the force that binds the telephone to the maternal every time our culture exhorts us to call our mothers.[6] But in letting the phone itself drift into metaphoric status, both studies allow it to recede from view just as it was getting interesting.[7] To explore the full importance of the telephone for film, we may then wish to recast the formulation of Bernhard Siegert, who has gone so far as to proclaim literature "an epoch of the postal system" that occurs "in the (self)-restraint and prolongation of the mail."[8] If the telephone replaced the letter and became the ubiquitous modern instrument for pursuing business or pleasure at a distance, and film replaced literature as the dominant narrative form, what would it mean to think of cinema as an epoch of the telephone system?

I will argue that this question has particular urgency for feminism, for "Ma Bell's" phone system has from almost the beginning been a heavily female domain. Not only are the stereotypical gossiping housewife and teenage girl among its most avid users (perhaps most memorably captured in *The Women* (1939) and *Bye-Bye Birdie* (1963), respectively), but the twin female occupations of operator and secretary install an anonymous female network at the very heart

Previous page: Barbara Stanwyck, on the phone and in danger, in *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948)

Right: Doris Day, with Thelma Ritter, in *Pillow Talk* (1959)

The private line in Crystal's bathroom—Rosalind Russell and Joan Crawford in *The Women* (1939)

of male telephone traffic.[9] That these positions hold considerable power and trust, moreover, can be confirmed in films such as *The Blue Gardenia* (1953) and *Bells are Ringing* (1960), which show the female phone worker drawn into the lives of the callers she serves. Indeed, Friedrich Kittler's epic media analysis would locate the female office worker in general at the center of modern discourse. For him, though, what is noteworthy is how the rhythm of modernity bounces its female subject back and forth between the typewriter and the cinema: "Every night the movie-continuum has to treat the wounds that a discrete machine inflicts upon secretaries during the day."[10] As striking as this pairing of film and typewriter is, in omitting the telephone it surprisingly ignores half the insight of Kittler's fellow prophet (and acknowledged influence) Marshall McLuhan: "The typewriter and the telephone are most unidentical twins that have taken over the revamping of the American girl with technological ruthlessness and thoroughness."[11] Indeed, what story of the American girl and the movies would be complete without the telephone by which she waits, and on which she makes plans, compares notes, confides her desires?

The telephone and the cinema share a parallel history. Born in the late nineteenth century, each achieved a certain kind of stability in the first half of the twentieth century, and each has now entered a period of mutation and complex interconnection with other technologies. For the purposes of this essay I am interested in the middle period of relative stability, when (supposedly) movies were movies, and phones were phones.[12] This confidence reflects nothing more than the predominance of certain uses over others, and the growth of institutions that support those uses. As we shall see, it is a confidence easily shaken. The normative model of telephone use became of course the private dialogue, banishing to the margins of culture such alternatives as telephonic concerts or party wires.[13] The corresponding stability in the cinema came in retrospect to be called Classical Hollywood Cinema, defined above all by the systematic effacement of the technology of production in the service of ideological interests.[14] If such critical terminology has come under fire in recent film theory, I would suggest it is nonetheless worth bearing in mind long enough to discover the Classical Hollywood Telephone, even if this theoretical object should give way in its turn. The point, then, will be to consider what our fantasies of the phone and our fantasies of the movies have to do with each other.

The Classical Hollywood Telephone

> *Few Americans found the telephone dramatic beyond about 1910.*
>
> —Claude S. Fischer[15]

The closer the telephone comes to perfection, the more we forget about it.[16] Understood as communications technology, the ideal telephone disappears into the content of the message it transmits. Moreover, it always reaches the person you want, when you want,

without exposing you to unwelcome interruption. Its sound is clear. And it represents us as well as—or better than—we could represent ourselves, conferring advantages not unlike those of correspondence by letter, which the shy Samuel Richardson notoriously preferred to face-to-face conversation. Much like letters, telephone conversations seem more subject to control, and more capable of perfection, than exchanges that depend on our whole bodies. As a critic of the great epistolary novelist has put it, "anything too inert and physical, anything that is resistant to the subject is filtered out. . . . "[17] Such analysis lies in close parallel to the rhetoric of one telephone enthusiast: "The telephone was the first device to allow the spirit of a person expressed in his own voice to carry its message directly without transporting his body."[18] What quickly becomes apparent is how the fantasy of limitless self-extension through technology calls forth an equally idealized self to be extended.

But the catch is that this ideal self is always understood to be at least in part a lie or evasion, an assertion of the speaker's control of discourse at the expense of the listener's knowledge. There is thus not much room in this fantasy for other people, other desires. At its limit, the dream of perfect communication, of an open and balanced dialogue, turns into its opposite: a monologue, with a line that runs in only one direction. Conversations turn into competitions over who will control a meaning that remains always singular. Indeed, these high stakes may account for the considerable affective charge, both positive and negative, that the telephone is capable of carrying, and that allows it to erupt out of quotidian dormancy into dramatic significance.[19] Corresponding to the poles of affect, the ideal phones of Classical Hollywood Cinema speak endless messages of love and death. This spectacle entrances viewers with a sense that entire worlds are somehow literally "on the line," without necessarily drawing any special attention to the apparatus itself, and is thus well-suited to genres that deliver those messages as a matter of course. The Classical Hollywood Telephone appears in full force in *The Big Sleep,* and my analysis will begin there, going on to chart a path of increasing deviation from this ideal in other major films, moving from the disavowal of the ideal in *It's a Wonderful Life* to its utter negation in *Chinatown,* and finally to its powerful transformation in the most interesting telephonic film I know: *Sorry, Wrong Number*.

Perhaps no film deploys a more elaborately classical telephone than the notorious hybrid of romance and detective film: Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946), in which Humphrey Bogart's Phillip Marlowe, that most idealized of selves, dispenses love, death, and other ostensibly just desserts through his consummate mastery of the telephone. It is a well-known story that the film deviates from Raymond Chandler's novel with the express purpose of advancing the team of Bogart and Lauren Bacall as a star vehicle.[20] The main changes were thus a plot more flattering to the couple of destiny, and more scenes for Bacall, two of which involve important phone calls. In the first, Bacall's character (Vivian Rutledge, née Sternwood), blackmailed over a compromising photograph of her sister, comes to Marlowe's office to discuss what to do. When he asks why she didn't go to the police, she calls his bluff, and picks up the phone. As she is about to identify herself to a cop, Marlowe grabs the phone and begins talking a game of nonsense, passing the phone to his "mother"—Vivian—who now willingly carries on the game. As a reward for her participation, Marlowe announces that, while still loyal to her father who hired him, he is "beginning to like another one of the Sternwoods." Thus the telephone ushers in the love plot, though not in the equal way many have claimed for the film, as Marlowe entirely sets the terms of the game he initiates and concludes.[21] If anything, Vivian's romantic eligibility lies in her capacity to appreciate his abilities and follow his lead.

This point is confirmed by the other important phone call that Hawks adds, by which Marlowe arranges the final encounter with the gangster Eddie Mars, deceiving him about his location to set up a deadly ambush. Here Vivian's role is reduced to that of redundant commentator, reflecting back to Marlowe—and the viewer—the obvious fact that he is "taking an awful chance." Indeed, for Marlowe and other classical heroes, using the telephone is a high stakes game. But a critical look at *The Big Sleep* can show us precisely what disappears into the intimacy of the classical phone: any sense of what might be at stake outside that intimacy. Not only will Eddie Mars join the long list of casualties at the film's end for reasons that look a lot like personal revenge, the film achieves its final coupling at the expense of the bad half of the Sternwood sisters, since Vivian's loyalty must be pried from her sister, who will be institutionalized.

Gerald Mast has called the telephone the "perpetual means of telling lies and spinning strategies in the film," but we should stress that this fact makes the representation of the telephone no less idealized, for its potential threats to the narrative's double generic program are always diffused.[22] When Vivian twice attempts to deceive Marlowe over the phone, for instance, he is not fooled. Never jeopardizing his con-

Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall making calls in *The Big Sleep* (1946)

trol of either the romance or detective plots, the phone is Marlowe's friend. And so this happy partnership is one of mutual cover. As an audience, we can forget that Marlowe needs the phone to be master of his situation, and we can forget that our fantasy of an ideal phone needs Marlowe's fast talking as a front. Leaving us to our fantasies of mastery, the telephone goes quietly about its business.[23]

We might say that with the Classical Hollywood Telephone there is a very powerful way in which the medium is indeed the message, in that when we see a character grab a phone in a movie, the fact that she has picked up the phone potentially tells us more, without any thought on our part, than whatever she has to say. It tells us that the scene is receptive to the singular messages of genre, signifying in turn a character's availability, or her vulnerability. In other words, when the phone disappears from notice, it returns as the repressed to exercise a far more powerful and economical narrative function. My claim is that the economy achieved by forgetting the telephone is therefore achieved at high cost, and that necessary critical gains can be made by calling attention to the phone, and breaking the spell.

Fortunately, some films tell us a different story about the telephone if we know how to listen, reminding us above all that the phone traffics in *coincidence*. I don't just mean by this the common telepathic sensation of calling someone only to have her say something like "I was just about to call you." Even if we routinely plan calls, subjecting them to all the rationalized coordination of clocks and time zones, we must understand each call as ripe for the occurrence of multiple, contingent events. We could dial a wrong number, or pick up a neighbor's call, or simply get disconnected. And when everything goes right with the phone itself, there is still the question of controlling our immediate environment, for despite our breathless concentration, enhanced by phone booths and cued in the movies by the close-up, we are not just a mouth and an ear when we talk on the phone.[24] Our whole body remains open to an unpredictable world, to noise, interruption, or even assault. Nor is our participation in

physical space merely passive. Indeed, to describe phone conversations as only "point-to-point" communications belies the very nature of sound, for of course we cannot easily confine our voice to the mouthpiece. It will tend to bounce around the room, subjecting us simultaneously to the hazards of disturbing others and to eavesdroppers—an enormous issue even before we consider the extension, the party line, or the wiretap. When films notice all of this they risk giving away the secret tryst between cinema and the telephone. But as we shall see, this risk can be assumed if a film is prepared to disavow its own telephonic sophistication. Such is the case in a film with which any discussion of Classical Hollywood Cinema must come to terms, Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).[25]

In *It's a Wonderful Life,* destiny arrives through the telephone. Famously torn between desire and duty, adventure and community, George Bailey's fate is sealed by a remarkable phone call that interrupts a stormy visit to Mary, the woman he loves but so desperately does not want to marry. As romantic phone calls go, it is hardly typical. Instead of protecting the privacy of the romantic dyad, this telephone call opens up to no fewer than four major parties—George and Mary sharing an old-fashioned phone, her boyfriend Sam in New York, and her mother eavesdropping on and off the extension upstairs—all talking at cross purposes.[26] Mary wants to marry George, but her mother wants her to marry Sam. Sam wants George to invest in soybean plastics, while George wants nothing to do with any of it. If anything, of course, this cacophony is far more erotic than the typical telephonic duet: for George mimetically because of the confrontation with his rival, for Mary because of the dependably stimulating effects of maternal disapproval. And it is above all the old phone technology, with its separate transmitter and receiver, which allows them to share the conversation and thus stand so close together. As the scene's erotic intensity overwhelms the couple, the phone literally drops out—we hear it bang on the floor and then George launches into his passionate denial that turns into an embrace. In fact the scene represents a triple rejection of audio technology in all its voices, beginning when Mary smashes a record before answering the phone, and ending with George's refusal of Sam's offer, "the biggest thing since radio." So much for the temptations of modernity.

Thus the telephone both puts George in contact with what might have been and represents the alternative that must be rejected. That is to say, George not only hears the voice of the big city over the phone, the phone becomes the emblem of that voice, particularly as we notice that Sam speaks on a more modern phone (the one we have come to know, with receiver and transmitter in one unit), and has two telephones to spare on his desk.[27] In case we miss this detail in the short and single appearance of Sam's office on screen, the pattern repeats: the phone George uses in the Bailey Bros. Building and Loan is also old-fashioned, while the evil banker Potter issues his threats and directives from a modern phone. And yet some sleight-of-hand is at work in establishing this low-tech bias. After all, the only character to demonstrate more than a naive awareness of the telephone is Mary, with her keen sense of how to manipulate the positions of multiple listeners. But this female agency is dangerous to a story bent on proving only the vital importance of George, as is the mere fact that Mary also has choices to make over the phone. A full recognition of George's debt to the powerful alliance of the telephone and female agency is intolerable because that alliance itself is intolerable, for if in *It's a Wonderful Life* the telephone represents the seductive call of the great modern world, then Mary must be the opposite, standing for the redeeming hearth and home of a bygone age. It finally takes nothing less than the film's Dickensian magic to convert Mary from a trap into a reward, for it is only in the vision of her as a spinster in a world without George Bailey that she is the dependent he needs to imagine her.[28] George's disavowed debt will nonetheless continue to accrue, for it will be Mary's quiet rallying of support, beginning with a phone call to her uncle, which achieves George's financial rescue behind the scenes while Clarence the wingless angel rescues him spiritually.

In the end the film does acknowledge communications technology, but only in the form of Sam's telegram from London—a generous loan offer reduced by the town's outpouring of support to a kind of redundant homage to the "richest man in town." This putting of technology in its place prepares us for the ultimate fantasy of a perfectly idealized—and archaic—telephone that speaks only one message. As George comes to learn, "every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings." In such intimate contact with a divine elsewhere, George can finally lay down his travel brochures. Thus the film concludes, like its great television rival, *The Wizard of Oz,* that there is no place like home, and we don't need E.T. to tell us that this message comes not from heaven, but from science fiction and the telephone system.

But when home remains unredeemed, the phone can only reach the uncanny. Such is the lesson for Jake Gittes, the lonely detective of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), whose investigations begin with

the wrecked homes of divorce cases and move toward incest, perhaps the most intimate crime of all. Set back in the thirties, *Chinatown* follows on the heels of a tendency in the sixties to connect the phone to male paranoia and cold-war hysteria, as seen in such notable films as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Fail Safe* (1964), and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), and would appear in the same year as the culmination of audio paranoia in *The Conversation,* just after Watergate. At the time of its release, then, it was certainly no longer possible to sustain an ideal view of the phone, or to pretend, as in *It's a Wonderful Life*, that the phone could conveniently disappear. Indeed, Polanski brings this skepticism to the project of re-envisioning the classical period through what John Cawelti has called "generic transformation."[29] If *The Big Sleep* found a way to pursue both romance and detective work through the telephone, *Chinatown* takes up that double pursuit and follows it to a telephonic dead-end.

Both the love plot and the detective plot derail due to telephone calls. When the phone calls Evelyn Mulwray out of bed with Jake, it delivers him a choice that is essentially generic: trust Evelyn, as she asks, and find love, or investigate her and solve the mystery. When Gittes continues to investigate, that route is blocked by a phone call from the police in the middle of the night: they have found his home number on the wall of a murdered woman, and will hound him until the end of the film. Unlike Marlowe, who kept the phone under his sole control, Gittes finds himself perpetually open to the calls of others.[30] As Avital Ronell argues in *The Telephone Book,* "the telephone belongs to the artwork both as parasitical inclusion and as its veiled receiver, the opening from which invisible vents are directed, quietly co-occupying the scene with the voices of commanding phantoms."[31] We might moreover understand these voices as speaking the law of genre, and very much in Derrida's double sense that genres are at once "not to be mixed" and subject to a prior law of contamination.[32] For Gittes, detection and romance are as irreconcilable as knowledge and ignorance; they represent two different ways of being in the world. At the same time, his investigation—in a woman's pay, into a woman's mystery—has romance as its very ground.

Cawelti argues that *Chinatown* represents generic transformation in the mode of "demythologization," pointing up the inadequacy of the myth of the private eye in the kind of world Gittes inhabits.[33] What must be added is how heavily this perceived inadequacy is a result of the detective's entanglement in feminine discourse—and not only in that his use of the phone means a considerable reliance on a female work force, but that a great part of the business of investigation looks an awful lot like gossip. Indeed, what Gittes and Marlowe share is an interest in their scandalous cases in explicit excess of their professional obligations.[34] Both continue investigating well after they have been paid and asked to stop, and Jake's nosiness is the cause of a famously literalized punishment at the hands of Polanski himself.[35] What haunts Jake's supposedly rational investigation, the uncanny lure that whispers his name through the telephone (and deems that name comically unpronounceable), is in fact the mystery of his own curiosity.

What Jake finds so fascinating is the shadowy world of female networks. The film's deepest mystery turns precisely on the problem of relationship between women, as Evelyn cannot designate the woman who is both her sister and her daughter. It shows in a world of patriarchal crime just how tangled a woman's entry into discourse can be. Moreover, Jake only comes to know this world through his own progressive emasculation; as is often pointed out, the police, agents of masculine authority, won't listen to him by the end when it matters most.[36] What *Chinatown* cannot do is bring itself to believe in the power of female discourse. It is a film that questions profoundly the novelistic desire to know personal secrets, and the power of such knowledge to do any real good, thus implicating not only the detective, but also the culture that loves him. But perhaps the film ends in despair because it pursues a novelistic interest in personal scandal from a male perspective, disavowing the historically feminine association of this interest. The detective genre, we might suspect, could only remain a political dead end until the detective, a telephonic subject and incorrigible gossip, owned up to her discursive status, and became a woman.[37]

Voices Carry

> *Under the conditions of high technology, literature has nothing more to say. It ends in cryptograms that defy interpretation and only permit interception.*
>
> —Friedrich Kittler[38]

The definitive film about the telephonic investigations of a woman is Anatole Litvak's gothic masterpiece, *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948), which chronicles the last evening in the life of an invalid named Leona Stevenson. As important as this film has been to feminist film criticism, and as seriously as its phones have been taken, it has not been understood in its full telephonic complexity. The fact that most of this film's narrative information comes through a woman on the phone

implicates our investment in the diegetic truth of the images we see, and hence in the detective plot that seems to unfold before us. Leona's detection begins with a shot of a phone off the hook in the office of one "Henry J. Stevenson," a shot that poses two simple questions: Who is Henry J. Stevenson, and why is his phone off the hook? The second question will be displaced, and likely forgotten, in a series of more pressing questions that arise during the course of the film. The first will be quickly, if inadequately, answered by the appearance of the bedridden Leona on the other end of the line, trying to reach her husband. And while Leona will now take over the film's present, making and receiving the calls that make up the bulk of the film, Henry's absence structures the film until he calls Leona twice from a phone booth at the end. Indeed, Henry's inaccessibility is what installs Leona immediately in the position of the detective; in tracking down her husband, she pursues the questions of the film, questions that will at once take a dark and serious turn.

The plot thickens when Leona is mistakenly connected to another conversation and overhears two men plotting a murder for 11:15 that night. As a clock by her bed reads 9:23, the questions of who will die and why come to shape and intensify the film's detective structure, and hence Leona's activities. But as she tries to rescue the unknown victim, she also continues to search for Henry, calling his secretary to begin reconstructing his day and figure out what happened. Gradually, the plots dovetail. Along with Leona, we come to realize that the murder will be her own, and that her husband arranged it. We never learn why the phone was off the hook, but we learn all too well who Henry Stevenson is.

Thus much like the investigations of Jake Gittes, Leona's proceed from, and toward, a fundamental unrest at home. Indeed for the duration of *Sorry, Wrong Number,* Leona is not at home in at least two ways: from Chicago, she finds herself alone in a house in New York City, and indeed, as a so-called "cardiac neurotic," Leona is not at home in her own body. Appropriately, Leona finds herself at home only in the state of disembodiment called talking on the telephone. Thus, the technology that mocks George Bailey for his lack of mobility compensates Leona for her far closer confinement. And yet in her insistent reliance on the phone, Leona falls into a most vicious stereotype of aggressive or foolish women callers tying up the lines. In doing so, she risks alienating everyone she speaks to, and the viewer as well.[39] Indeed, despite a degree of glamour unavoidably borrowed from the presence of Barbara Stanwyck, some critics have not hesitated to register their disgust with Leona—hence this film's reputation as a portrait of the controlling "Bitch Goddess," to quote the title of an article that prominently features her image.[40] Understood in the context of telephonic breakdown that the film develops, this representation becomes the portrait of a cultural swindle, standing for the systematic denial of all that the telephone should mean to women: the end of gothic isolation through continuous sympathetic contact among women.[41]

But in *Sorry, Wrong Number* the gothic in fact seems to overwhelm and even incorporate the phone that would ostensibly be its technological antidote. Certainly the essential gothic trappings are all there: isolation in a big creepy house, a husband as the possible source of terror, and the heroine's investigation of that terror. The gothic, moreover, precisely defines a space where the ideal telephone breaks down, for in the recurring figure of the suspected husband, the messages of love and death become hopelessly mixed. Thus the film will not depict the phone as an extension of rationality, but instead invoke a phone of the darkest superstition, one that initiates an inexorable gothic plot through the most eerie force of coincidence. We are offered an image of this nightmare phone in the opening titles of the film: it is the huge, menacing shadow phone looming above its ordinary counterpart. Litvak's film, moreover, sustains a darkness that is rare even in the gothic, for the eventual triumph of rationalism that we find in novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or *Dracula* never comes. Instead, the fateful crossed line of Leona's first phone call marks the film's permanent shift to this register of what we might call a telephonic unconscious. From this moment it will be most of the film's business, as carried out through Leona's relentless telephonic investigations, to try to bring us back to the light of day, to rationalize this event and domesticate the phone. But like her husband Henry's second call home at the end, this assurance does not get through, for the film cannot finally untangle her from its telephonic nightmare.[42] The killer who invades her house on schedule appears, apart from his white-gloved hands, almost entirely in shadow, an avatar of the nightmare phone. Henry's final call represents the last attempt to bring the phone to some rational account, and that call, or so the voice of this shadowy killer tells us, is a wrong number.[43]

What Leona does manage to reconstruct comes from a variety of sources: six calls that trigger flashbacks of increasing complexity, a telegram, and her own memory.[44] Most baroque is the structure of a call to her doctor, which includes a flashback within a flashback where Henry tells his version of their marriage

to the doctor who in turn tells it to Leona, and hence suggests all the transmission problems of a game of telephone. Pared down to essentials, the account goes something like this: Henry resents her because she took him away from his girlfriend Sally, stuck him in a token job at Cotterell's, her father's drug company, and continues to manipulate him through continual phone surveillance and occasional well-timed fits of cardiac neurosis. When Henry tries to find work on his own her father uses his connections to block him, insisting that Henry's only job is to take care of Leona. Desperate to achieve independence, Henry starts to skim from the company, gets squeezed by mobsters, and puts a contract on Leona's life to get the insurance money.

What must be questioned, then, is the common assumption that we should accept this account of the murder plot at face value. It is this assumption, for instance, that allows *Sorry, Wrong Number* to figure prominently in Kaja Silverman's landmark study of the female voice in cinema, *The Acoustic Mirror*, which draws a contrast between two versions of Leona: the powerful woman of the flashbacks who demonstrates "symbolic mastery" and the helpless woman of the present who exhibits increasing verbal incompetence, reverting finally with her scream at the end to the infantile condition in which Patriarchy prefers her.[45] But as Amy Lawrence has argued in an extended and subtle analysis of the film, there are no clear grounds for accepting the authority of the flashbacks, for what we see and hear could be no more than a representation of Leona's thoughts.[46] Even if we could accept the flashbacks, they cannot account for many of the real mysteries of the film: the flood of coincidences that defy explanation, and the feeling that making sense of them is itself difficult and dangerous. Thus Silverman reads the film more classically than it seems to want to be read. Even as her critique challenges the representation of the speaking woman, it sustains the fantasy of an ideal phone transmitting clear, singular messages. But telephonic coincidence is so central to Leona's experience on the phone this fateful night, and likewise to our viewing experience, that to overlook it is to neglect the full import of what the film is doing.

Sorry, Wrong Number is in fact a film that presents itself in terms of coincidence from the very beginning. As we look at the titles, not only do we see a phone itself doubled by its larger shadow, but we also hear a busy signal—perhaps the most basic representation of telephonic coincidence, of too much talk clogging up the system. This busy signal, moreover, seeps into the musical score, producing a corresponding instrumental echo. Returning soon with the film's first interior shots of the phone off the hook in Henry's office, this echo simultaneously evokes and refuses the illusion of matching sound.[47] Coming before we meet Leona, this tantalizing mismatch is important because it establishes an unusual dynamic between what is often called story and discourse, between the world the film evokes and the mode and manner in which that world is presented. Indeed, while the story of the film, the one Leona pieces together that seems to account for her death, is shot through with misogynistic tropes, the discourse participates in something feminine, a certain saturation or busyness that worries easy listening in a male key.

This feminine discourse makes itself known in the film's prologue, letting us know what to expect for the next eighty-nine minutes. Between the shot of the doubled phone and the tracking shot into Henry's office we see a row of female operators working a switchboard. Against this image the following epigraph scrolls up the screen:

> In the tangled networks of a great city, the telephone is the unseen link between a million lives. . . . It is the servant of our common needs-the confidante of our inmost secrets . . . life and happiness wait upon its ring . . . and horror . . . and loneliness . . . and . . . *death*!!!

Within this fairly typical recital of telephonic ambivalence, we notice "confidante" in the feminine form. The telephone, at least in its most intimate modes, is female, though any fantasy of confidential dialogue we might entertain is undercut by the sound of the busy signal.[48] When we meet Leona, we learn she is responsible for that signal. She has been trying to reach Henry, and her assumption that this will be possible reflects a split between male and female domains precisely at the point of participation in the telephone system. A busy signal, as the name suggests, signifies ostensibly that a phone is being *used*, so Leona assumes that Henry is talking on the phone to someone else, making it worth her while to keep trying to reach him. The one thing alien to Leona, the telephonic subject, is a phone off the hook. But consciously or not, the man has begged off.[49] Let loose from the discourse, he is out making trouble in the story.

This trouble makes its presence felt immediately when, as she continues to try to reach Henry, Leona's line gets crossed, and she overhears the killers plotting the murder that will turn out to be her own. When Leona asks the operator to trace the call, she finds herself locked into a complex double role of detective and victim that unleashes a flood of explanation and commits her to an essentially reactive position. A trace is

indeed a repetition of lines already drawn—here they have not been drawn in her favor, and will double back upon her. But Leona is not for all that a single-minded phone-user. In this very first exchange, where she asks for the trace, she is already asking for something else as well. She gives the operator a great deal of extra information, explaining her situation and describing what hearing such a frightening call meant to her. In an emergency, such digression certainly counts as "talking too much," but we should note the need for sympathy behind this inefficiency, and the view of the phone that makes Leona seek it here. Leona's position amounts to an insistence that the phone remain personal, allowing for sympathetic attention, or the world will become all business.[50] It stands in direct contrast to her characterization of male phone conversations at their most lethal. When the operator asks if the killers might still be on the line, Leona scoffs "they weren't exactly gossiping." We might take Leona's dismissive statement as the strongest objection a film could raise against a male discourse that liquidates the personal.

Thus if the business of this film lies in recovering its plot, this business can only be conducted through the personalized channels of female networks. We should not be surprised that the film's feminine discourse will not leave the story alone, that this film will be "busy" in a way that jams the system—and not just the phone system, but the system of the movies itself. *Sorry, Wrong Number* is above all a *noisy* movie, and not only in the sense that the soundtrack tends to be quite loud, but also that information comes at the viewer with such speed and density as to border on sensory overload. If there is a message in the eventual death of the talking woman in the film, we should be careful not to assume that it comes through loud and clear, as if over a Classical Hollywood Telephone. Rather than allowing any cruel satisfaction in the punishment of the heroine, the effect of this discourse is to bring the heroine and the viewer together in shared confusion and distress. Sometime during the course of Leona's adventures on the phone, our disapproval ought to give way to sympathy, to a positive and unexpected emotional coincidence with a figure we habitually dislike. By the end we are very much in her position, paralyzed in our seats as the killer creeps inexorably up the stairs. Our resulting impulse to cut through the din and communicate with the heroine carries us to the far end of the telephonic imagination, where a different kind of ideal telephone goes under the name of telepathy.

Telepathy is the telephone in a state of perfect dematerialization—no apparatus, no sound waves, no ear. Thoughts simply move from one mind to another without static, delay, or the need for translation. The only thing that can go wrong is the mind itself, as Hitchcock shows us in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), in which a young girl's telepathic connection with her favorite uncle turns into a dangerous link to a deranged killer. But narrative film in fact stimulates telepathic fantasy as a part of its usual course of operations, making us long for telepathy every time we identify with a character and urgently wish to communicate with her. It is not surprising that Hitchcock, who often foregrounds the dynamics of viewing, has captured an analogous situation in a scene in *The Birds* (1963), where witnesses in a diner look through a window at a man who is about to drop his cigarette butt in gasoline, opening the window too late for him to heed their shouts of warning.[51] Indeed, horror and romance, with their heavy traffic in love and death, seem to produce the purest examples, prompting viewers to think "kiss her already!" or "look out!" When we actually vocalize these messages we slip back into the telephonic, and the tendency of such utterances in some viewing contexts to prove either funny or embarrassing has much to do with their incongruous status between the primitive mechanism of the unaided voice and the desire for an impossible technology that motivates the outburst. But there is perhaps a still deeper sense of ourselves as being in telepathic conversation with a film as we watch it. Chris Marker has referred in particular to the voice-over as "the destiny of cinema: it is soliloquy, it is a telephone system to the inner self."[52] If the voice-over is the film talking to us, there are also moments where we feel the lines run both ways—uncanny moments where the film seems to emanate from our desire or fear and nowhere else.

As the end of the telephone, telepathy is not free from its own nightmares, nightmares that take hold in the collapse of distance between self and other. Telepathic invasion haunts characters from episodes of *The X-Files* and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* back to George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil,* where in each case telepathic sensitivity leads to audio overload, a barrage of alien voices drowning out consciousness. Jacques Derrida confesses an inverted form of this anxiety, where it is the self that cannot help destroying the distance it requires:

> what I always have difficulty getting used to: that non-telepathy is possible. Always difficult to imagine that one can think something to oneself [*à part soi*], deep down inside, without being surprised by the other, without the other being immediately informed, as easily as if it

> had a giant screen in it, at the time of the talkies, with remote control [*télécommande*] for changing channels and fiddling with the colours, the speech dubbed with large letters in order to avoid any misunderstanding. For foreigners and deaf-mutes.[53]

This fear exposes a deep irony, in that it turns the very perfection of telepathy against us in the service of endless exposure. Such exposure has historically been of particular concern to women, as in an epistolary novel like Frances Burney's *Evelina,* where publication and authorship are in fundamental tension with a feminine modesty that shuns exposure. But while Burney shields her heroine by burying her novel's female networks under an exemplary feminine epistolary performance, no such thing happens in *Sorry, Wrong Number*. In fact, if we seriously entertain the idea that most of the images in this film are representations of Leona's thoughts, what could be more invasive? The most important feminist objection to this film may be that it refuses the dignity of privacy to its heroine. And yet we would do well to hold on to the fantasy of telepathy as a counterweight to the foreclosing power of its competing fantasy, the Classical Hollywood Telephone, which has nothing to tell us beyond another mindless iteration of generic closure, nothing to tell us but that Leona, and all she stands for, is dead. Exposure may be the price of having a voice, for out of the nightmares of telepathy we get a glimpse of a more hopeful kind of telephonic film, a film that stages the unlikely coincidence of minds that is real sympathy. Making use of the phone's inherent potential to route interest along unpredictable lines, such a film would baffle the smooth channeling of desire into narrow social expectations, and might amaze the consumers of genre with its vision of how much more there is to want.

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Notes

1. Tom Gunning, for instance, has claimed that: "early filmmakers incorporated recent technology into the plots of their films to naturalize film's power to move through space and time. The telephone supplies a particularly powerful example" (187). See "Heard Over the Phone: The Lonely Villa and the de Lorde Tradition of the Terrors of Technology," *Screen* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 184-196.
2. Although he shows little interest in film, John Brooks does consider the consequences for narrative of the technological shift from letters to phones, speculating briefly about the possibility of a novel consisting of nothing but phone calls—only to announce, quite prematurely in my opinion, that "the telephone as a subject for the creative imagination has been exhausted" (223). See "The First and Only Century of Telephone Literature," in Ithiel de Sola Pool, ed., *The Social Impact of the Telephone*. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1977): 208-24.
3. Gunning, "Heard Over the Phone," 195.
4. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 65.
5. Ibid., 62.
6. The groundbreaking essay about the gender of the viewer was of course Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975). The trope of calling one's mother receives play in many films. Noteworthy examples include: *The Thin Man* (1934), *Bells Are Ringing* (1960), *The Misfits* (1961), *Nashville* (1975), and *Mother* (1996).
7. E.L. McCallum is among the few critics to make the kinds of claims I am making for the narrative centrality of the telephone. In her essay about *The Crying of Lot 49* and *The House of the Seven Gables* (a novel which of course predates the telephone), she argues that the importance of "wired communications [in these texts] . . . goes further than simply topic or style, implicating their very structure and interpretation." See "Hawthorne and Pynchon on the Line," *Arizona Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 65-96.
8. Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System,* trans Kevin Rapp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
9. Regarding operators, Kenneth Lipartito reports that "[s]ince the 1880's, the telephone companies employed women almost exclusively in this position, a practice also followed in other nations" (1082). See "When Women were Switches: Technology, Work, and Gender in the Telephone Industry, 1890-1920," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (October 1994): 1075-1111. For further discussion of operators see Brenda Maddox, "Women and the Switchboard," in *The Social Impact of the Telephone:* 262-80.
10. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 175.
11. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 266.
12. Swedish scholar Jan Olsson has conducted exhaustive research on the telephone in early cinema, and a version of his findings should be available in English soon. He reports that the telephone of early cinema is usually represented as a positive marvel, though some films already use the phone to deliver "highly unwelcome, hair-raising messages." He makes clear that the question of what should be seen during a filmed phone call was by no means obvious, demonstrating that many films adopted the "split-screen solutions" of post-cards, often including a middle panel that represented the space bridged by a phone call even as it emphasized the distance between parties.
13. For an excellent discussion of the many different ways the telephone has been used, see Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
14. For a critical history of this terminology, see Christopher Williams, "After the Classic, the Classical, and Ideology:

the Differences of Realism" in *Reinventing Film Studies,* eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000): 206-20.

15. Claude S. Fischer, *America Calling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 243.
16. Henry Boettinger has speculated that the phone has disappeared from notice because "no other device can be used (in safety) with such total disregard of the thing itself" (200). See "Our Sixth-and-a-Half Sense," in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*: 200-07. While his claim for the importance of safe use should not be ignored, clearly he goes too far in singling out the telephone from a long list of "dangerous" inventions. Can anyone recall a telescope, to name one of his examples, causing a serious accident? But a consensus remains that the telephone is typically seen, as Claude S. Fischer puts it, as an "anonymous object" with a "shortage of charisma." See Fischer, 259 and 253.
17. William Warner, *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 101.
18. Boettinger, 205.
19. Avital Ronell makes a similar point: "The telephone puts you at risk, or it figures the language of risk—where is your own risk (at your own risk)." See *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 357.
20. For a discussion of these changes, see Gerald Mast, *Howard Hawks, Storyteller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 269-274.
21. In taking this position I extend the objection of Raymond Bellour, who in his famous frame-by-frame analysis of Marlowe and Vivian's love scene in a car, finds a profound gender asymmetry in the fact that it is Vivian "whose magnified face simultaneously and wholly expresses and receives the admission of love." See "The Obvious and the Code" *Screen* 15, no. 4 (1974), 15.
22. Mast, 294.
23. For discussions of *The Big Sleep* as male fantasy, see David Thomson's essays "At the Acme Bookshop" *Sight and Sound* 50, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 122-25 and *The Big Sleep* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), especially 46-47.
24. My own attention was called to this idea by Kittler's discussion of Hugo Munsterberg's early writing on film: "Close-ups are not just 'objectivizations' of attention; attention itself appears as the interface of an apparatus." See Kittler, 162-63.
25. For other examples of telephonic disavowal, consider William Castle's campy horror flick *I Saw What You Did* (1965), or the more famous *Pillow Talk* (1959). These films are obsessed with the telephone, but must reject it to achieve some semblance of generic closure. In both cases, the closure feels abrupt and forced, and fails precisely to deal with the threat the telephone poses to women —despite the films' elaborate explorations of that very threat.
26. There are at least two more people in Sam's office who can hear what he is saying. One, an attractive young woman, drapes herself over him as he speaks, clearly signaling that we can let George steal Mary away without guilt. The other is a faceless man who at one point can be heard to contribute the word "jellybeans" to the conversation.
27. George uses what appears to be a version of "the old standup Bell model of 1914," which lasted "officially until 1927 and in out-of-the-way places long after that." I am comparing these phones to the pictures in Ellen Stern and Emily Gwathmey, *Once Upon a Telephone* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 35.
28. I refer of course to the fact that the basic idea of using impossible visions to induce a change of heart comes from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Howard Rosenberg has observed the unlikeliness that someone as attractive as Donna Reed could find no one else—and a reader of his points out that the bigger insult is that the life of a single woman is the ultimate horror in this male fantasy. See "A 'Wonderful Life' in Bedford Falls? Bah!" *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 2000: Calendar Live and "'It's a Wonderful Life' Debate, Take 2" *Los Angeles Times,* December 18, 2000: Calendar Live.
29. John Cawelti, "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979): 559-79. Rpt. in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 183-201.
30. Despite cultural fantasies of telephonic mastery, Jake's vulnerability seems to more accurately reflect our historical submission to the telephone. Jan Olsson reports that, as a rule, characters in early films answer the phone unless physically unable. Later films suggest the persistence of the ringing phone's commanding power: at one point in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) the police conclude without hesitation that Sam Spade was not at home because they called and he didn't answer. More famously, the entire plot of *Dial M for Murder* (1954) presupposes that Grace Kelly will get out of bed to answer the phone.
31. Ronell, 213.
32. See "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn 1980), 55 and 57.
33. Cawelti, 194.
34. John Belton argues similarly that Gittes "remains more intent on satisfying his own curiosity than on fulfilling his professional obligations to his clients," and that the "desire for knowledge which characterizes the detective genre as a whole is translated by Polanski into virtually pornographic interest in sexual misconduct." See "Language, Oedipus, and Chinatown," *MLN* 106 (1991), 942.
35. The director plays a thug who slashes Gittes's nose with a knife. The detective appears subsequently in the film with a ridiculous bandage on his nose.
36. See for instance Belton, 944, and Deborah Linderman "Oedipus in Chinatown, *Enclitic* 5 (Fall 1981), 194.
37. In a marvelous comic piece on Sherlock Holmes and the telephone, Robert E. Robinson suggests that Holmes avoids the phone because he fears it is controlled by his nemesis, the arch-criminal Professor James Moriarty. See "Exit James Moriarty—Enter the Telephone Company" *The Baker Street Journal* 32, no. 1 (March 1982): 20-24. Holmes nonetheless made full use of long-distance communication systems in the form of the telegraph, as Siegert notes, citing in particular "The Five Pips." (143-4). We might say that the detective's independence from the telephone was as short-lived as the telegraph's, which according to Siegert was technologically subsumed in 1915 when the invention of the "wave filter" allowed telegrams to be sent over telephone lines (189).
38. Kittler, 263.

39. Stephen Farber has suggested that her fate is deserved: "We feel she almost deserves the brutal murder that [her husband] plots for her at the end of the film. It is her own ruthless possessiveness that leads to her violent death" (10). See "Violence and the Bitch Goddess," *Film Comment* 10 (Nov/Dec 1974): 8-11. The hated woman on the phone is nowhere more forcefully depicted than in Maggie Greenwald's film *The Kill-Off* (1990), in which another female invalid rules a small town via the telephone by her bed. Possessed of a mysterious access to the secrets of others, she wields this knowledge as a ruthless blackmailer and informer. The whole town wants her dead, and much of the suspense turns on who will actually be the one to kill her.
40. Farber, 8.
41. See for instance Michèle Martin "*Hello, Central?*" (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 148. Lana F. Rakow is quick to point out that, in furthering the separation of public and private spheres, "the telephone may have been implicated in creating the very conditions from which it was praised for having rescued women." See "Women and the Telephone: the Gendering of a Communications Technology," in *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping in Touch*, ed. Cheris Kramarae (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 209.
42. In *Detour* (1945) the femme fatale dies literally tangled up in a phone cord. But in other respects this film keeps its telephonic nightmare further below the surface—the hero, a would-be Phillip Marlowe, always seems carefully in control of his phone conversations.
43. J.P. Telotte makes the compelling observation that, given the general paranoia that characterizes *film noir*, "one never really reaches any 'wrong numbers' in the *noir* world." See *Voices in the Dark* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 87. We might contrast this claim with one made by Nicholas Royle in a discussion of Raymond Chandler's *The Little Sister*, in which the telephone gives us "always the wrong voice; the telephone is always contaminated with otherness." See *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 178. But perhaps these insights are not inevitably in opposition. To say that the telephone is contaminated with otherness is another way of stating the telephone's openness to coincidence; the phone is thus always "wrong" in that it cannot sustain the narcissistic feedback loop of what I call an ideal phone. At the same time, to the paranoid *noir* subject, there are never any wrong numbers for this very same reason, because the phone always delivers coincidence (to which the paranoiac always replies, "I think not").
44. The telegram is from Henry, and the choice is significant, for the archaic form precludes her talking back to him.
45. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 78-79.
46. Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 137. Lawrence does not push this insight as far as she might. Her conclusion that the film, in staying true to the conventions of *film noir,* must punish the dominating woman, only makes sense if we take the flashbacks at face value, for Leona does not control Henry in the film's present. But the strength of Lawrence's analysis of *Sorry, Wrong Number* comes in the context of her larger argument about the "problem of the speaking woman" and the relationship between sound and image. See in particular her excellent first chapter, which recasts the prehistory of cinema in terms of sound technology.
47. Rick Altman argues that matching sound represents an essential sleight-of-hand or "ventriloquism" in the function of narrative film: "Using the ideology of the visible as a front, the sound track remains free to carry on its own business." See "Cinema as Ventriloquism," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980), 76. In these terms, we might say that *Sorry, Wrong Number* exposes the soundtrack so that its business becomes available to criticism.
48. Ronell argues that "technology in some way is always implicated in the feminine. It is young; it is thingly. Thus every instrument of war is given a feminine name" (207).
49. The film will later show phones off the hook on two occasions. One is taken off deliberately (Sally takes the phone off the hook in her apartment before leaving to call Leona from the drug store where her husband won't hear); the other is knocked off accidentally (Henry knocks a phone off the desk of Leona's doctor in frustration when he learns of her diagnosis as "merely" neurotic).
50. *The Slender Thread* (1965) turns this model of phone use on its head. Having taken an overdose of pills, Anne Bancroft calls a suicide hotline where Sidney Poitier is working. In this emergency the business of his call *is* sympathy. Clearly the sin here would be to talk too little, as Poitier must keep Bancroft on the line until he can convince her to reveal her location.
51. Another example from Hitchcock would be the scene in *Rear Window* (1954) when Grace Kelly goes snooping in Raymond Burr's apartment. Deprived of the power of telepathy, Stewart cannot warn her that Burr has returned, and must resort to the inferior expedient of alerting the police by phone. Following Hitchcock, we might say that the desire for telepathy comes in particular from the feeling of suspense, as in his famous example of the viewer's apprehension of a bomb under a table.
52. Quoted from unpublished work in David Thomson, "Telephones," *Film Comment* 20 (1984): 30.
53. Jacques Derrida, "Telepathy," trans. Nicholas Royle, *Oxford Literary Review* 10 (1988), 13-4. Royle also quotes this passage in *Telepathy and Literature,* and notes that "the history of the term 'telepathy' is intimately related to that of the concept of sympathy." See pages 12 and 4.

Abstract What do our fantasies of the telephone have to do with our fantasies at the movies? This essay calls out the Classical Hollywood Telephone, the quiet object whose smooth transmission of narrative information bolsters generic closure, and installs in its place a phone open to coincidence, capable of diverting attention and routing interest along unpredictable lines.

Reviews

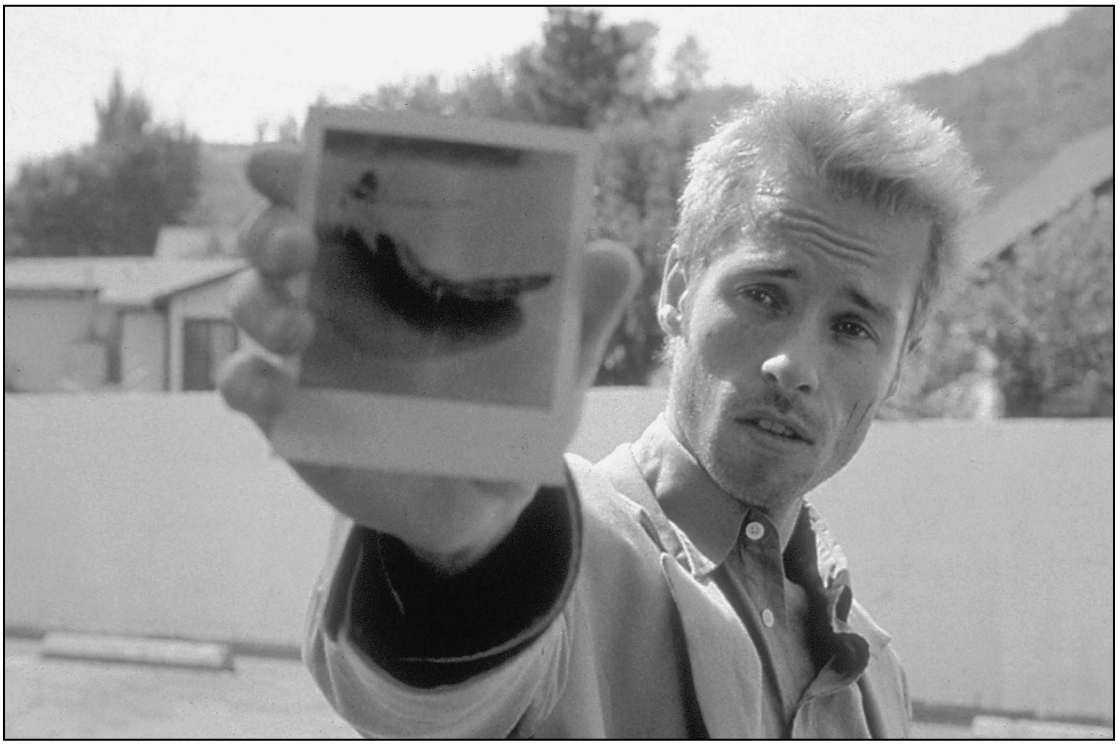
Memento

Director/writer: Christopher Nolan. Producers: Jennifer Todd, Suzanne Todd. Cinematographer: Wally Pfister. Newmarket.

The core concern of director Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) is the psychological denial of personal iniquity, a classic noir theme always worth re-exploring. What Nolan (inspired by the conceit of his brother Jonathan's short story "Memento Mori") has to say thus only begins with exploring the peculiarities of Leonard Shelby's anterograde memory loss and its role in his misguided pursuit of his wife Catherine's murderer. *Memento* goes on to expose Leonard's deliberate decisions to *lie* about his own past, to repeat those lies over and over until he himself believes them, to destroy evidence that would undermine those lies, and to fabricate new memories that further mask the truth. By so doing, Leonard not only justifies to himself an indefinitely extended series of new murders, but insures that those crimes too will fall into the memory hole.

Leonard is among the least reliable narrators we've seen in recent cinema (a medium which frequently invites audiences to identify with seriously flawed or damaged heroes). But Leonard's personal faults, and his personal suffering, are set quietly against a background which depicts the everyday mendacity of public life and extends to the falsification of recent history. The originality of *Memento* thus lies less in its exploration of a rare form of short-term memory loss (a condition dramatized in Tom Tykwer's *Winter Sleepers* only three years earlier) than in its allegorization of that phenomenon. For the revelation that Leonard Shelby is a moral monster exposes not merely the depravity of a single individual (or of the petty criminals who befriend him for their own sordid purposes), but a pathology of contemporary culture at large. Leonard's inability to acquire new memories after being clubbed on the head is not only a life-shattering individual catastrophe for him. It's also the ground figure of a metaphor for the obstruction of historical memory about the criminal exercise of power—a criminality which, just like Leonard's perverse and ultimately absurdist mission of retaliation, is typically masked as the pursuit of justice.

In this film's brilliantly-conceived opening shot, a Polaroid photo slowly un-develops before our eyes, its image of a face-down corpse fading to white. This begins a reverse-order sequence in which we see a murder un-done, a present fact resolved into the choices that composed it. And the scene's audacious fantasy is displayed for us as the product of some sophisticated



The Polaroid camera never lies? Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) shows one of his snapshots.

Photo courtesy of Photofest

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tricks. For one thing, we're hardly experiencing *everything* backwards. In particular, we hear each of the sequence's sounds—that single photo print whizzing back up into the body of the camera, a metal shell spinning to a stop on the flag stones, eyeglass lenses cracking upon impact, the gunshot's concussion—in its usual temporal order. In fact, we hear sounds that could not even have occurred: blood slurping as it recedes back towards the wound, the pistol slap as it flies back into the palm from which it was dropped. Furthermore, the blood from the fatal bullet doesn't merely flow along the floor towards the skull from which it came, it also flows impossibly upwards within a frame that's been tilted 90 degrees against gravity. And it flows, like the bullet flies, in slow-motion. These manipulations stand out against the standard techniques of framing, angling, cutting, color-tinting, and scoring, and because there's obviously wardrobe, set design, and acting on display before us, we're being offered the chance not just to watch this movie's signature titling sequence but to notice how it has been made.

Throughout *Memento* the challenge of sorting out what we've just watched requires noticing how we've been manipulated. Our sense of the uncanny in doing so isn't exactly the kind we may feel when knowingly under surveillance, or when being penetrated by ultrasound, CAT-scan, and more intrusive devices. It's even more flesh-crawling, as though we're being held in the cold eye of the gun poised to fire. *Memento* famously fractures a host of linear narrative conventions—interspersing color sequences with black-and-white, overlapping the beginnings and endings of sequences and so revising their contexts, multiplying leads and backtracking on clues. But the power of these devices comes from their cumulative impact upon the narrative tone. Nolan has made a film of clinical coolness, from the relentless blue lighting and winter-desert palette, the off-handed venality and cheerless good humor of a character like Burt, and an overall fascination with morbidity—each complementing the chill and remoteness of Guy Pearce's Leonard. Even more intensely than does the television genre which has emerged in its wake, *Memento*'s aesthetic combines the analytical tone and chemical rankness of the crime scene.

As Leonard tells anyone who'll listen, his wife was raped and murdered. The last new memories he reports are of intervening in that assault, shooting and killing one assailant but then being clubbed on the head by the second before watching his wife die. The second assailant escapes, and the police investigating the case remain unconvinced that any such person exists. Despite his damaged memory, Leonard persists in his own investigation. He's acquired the police file on the case, and, despite the many missing pages and numerous blacked-out sections, remains convinced that there's a "John G__" whom he must find and execute in the name of the revenge his wife deserves. This is a familiar but compelling movie premise: a weirdly handicapped American Everyman is denied the support or understanding of the legal system and so struggles against long odds both to prove his version of the truth about a terrible crime, and to secure justice for it.

Leonard's effort is seconded by a pair of characters who seem to offer him crucial help, but instead only perpetuate his vain pursuit of reconciliation with the past. Teddy, a corrupt former cop, claims to be the only official investigator of the assault case who believed Leonard's version might be correct. Whether or not that's true, he now makes it his business to set Leonard loose on a series of cash-heavy local narcotics dealers whom he persuades Leonard to take as incarnations of John G__. Leonard's search for justice is further thwarted by his involvement with Natalie, a barmaid who convinces Leonard she will help him because she too "has lost someone." We learn (and perhaps forget?) right along with Leonard that Natalie has no qualms about exploiting him to free her from the dangerous dilemma which his search for revenge has inadvertently created for her.

Our tendency to identify with a hero who, like Leonard Shelby, has suffered a serious loss—especially one who takes dangerous risks to recover what's been lost—remains one of the most powerful dynamics in all of film-viewing. Leonard's vulnerability to Teddy's greedy conniving and Natalie's scary duplicity further ratchets up our sympathy for him. But even this is trumped by the credit we're inclined to give Leonard for his own brave efforts to surmount his "condition." He's learned to rely on a series of reminders (brilliantly conceived and only gradually undercut). He preserves key items from his married life to keep him in mind of his dead wife. He struggles to glean information from the massive and mysteriously-truncated police file on his wife's assault. He takes Polaroid snapshots of persons, objects, and places, then stores them either in the six distinct pockets of his suit jacket, or in premarked locations on a folding wall-chart. On the front or back of each Polaroid image, Leonard makes brief notes to remind him of the most germane information he's acquired. Most strikingly of all, he tattoos his body with the most important "facts" he has discovered both about John G__ and about the limitations of his own psyche. Leonard's proud of this elaborate system, which he's convinced allows him to pursue justice with

Leonard contemplates his tattooed memories, with Natalie (Carrie-Anne Moss).

Photo courtesy of Photofest

impartiality, relying on "evidence" rather than the "interpretation" involved in mere memory, or the notoriously unreliable certitude of eyewitness testimony.

All of this—the background of Leonard's pursuit of John G__, the mixed motives of his associates, the rigors of his effort to compensate for his condition—is revealed to us with elegant precision. *Memento* is so ingeniously constructed that there's hardly a two-minute interval within which new and critical information doesn't come to our attention. This remains the case right up to the film's final sequence, at which point we reach some unsettling but firm conclusions:

- Leonard's diabetic wife was assaulted but *not* murdered by the assailants he remembers.
- Leonard's wife died some time later when Leonard himself administered her an overdose of insulin.
- With Teddy's help, Leonard found and killed the second assailant—the true John G__—more than a full year before the film's present action.
- Leonard has since found and killed a number of other John G__s. (In the film's present action, Leonard finds and kills both Jimmy Grantz and then Teddy himself, whose given name is John Edward Gammell.)

These points are all matters of plot. Compared with this movie's more telling revelations, they're made obvious, even trivial. But *Memento* is a work of art—an object that calls for prolonged examination, contemplation, and critical interrogation. Only the move from plot to the implications of plot for the character of the hero permits the set of stunning and far more disturbing conclusions laid out in the argument below—conclusions which bring to light the more general significance of Leonard Shelby's wayward pursuit of justice.

Leonard's relationship with his wife was unpleasantly tense and dangerously conflicted long before the terrible assault on her, and the murders it spawned. In the wake of her death, Leonard's invented a very different version of his history with Catherine to replace the painful truth. We're first clued into this when Natalie challenges Leonard to stop "reciting" his description of Catherine as "beautiful" and "perfect to [him]." (The film's screenplay describes Catherine as "plain," which we in fact see her to be.) In the single extended scene we see from the couple's married life, the two quarrel over Catherine's plan to re-read a favorite novel. "Don't be a prick," she tells her husband, "I'm not doing this to annoy you," but Leonard just bristles. In another brief flashback, Catherine slaps Leonard's hand for pinching her thigh. Most revealingly of all, Leonard repeatedly points out how much he hated his wife's habit of calling him "Lenny." (Doesn't it go without saying that happy couples don't persist in hated behaviors?) Leonard's cold to the escort he hires to im-

personate Catherine, and he brutally attacks Natalie (with whom he's shared intimacies). Domestic abusers are rarely selective in their victims, and it seems unlikely Catherine escaped Leonard's capacity for emotional and physical violence.

Leonard's been steadily destroying all evidence which reminds him how full of dissension his marriage was. He's staged a series of reenactments which temporarily bring back the memories he wishes to obliterate completely. "I can't remember to forget you," he says of Catherine after the evening with the escort. He then offers the single most important confession in this film: "I must have destroyed a truckload of your things." In other words, *Memento* reveals to us that Leonard Shelby is in the process of systematically obliterating the history of his probably violent and certainly unhappy marriage.

Leonard has also regularly and deliberately falsified critical elements of his system of "reminders" about the assault on Catherine. It's Leonard himself who has discarded nearly a dozen full pages from the police file and censored other large sections (we see him black out a note about Natalie's untrustworthiness when he wishes it to be false). Leonard has destroyed evidence frequently enough that he quickly points out to Natalie that she'll need to *burn* a Polaroid she's vainly trying to crumple up. Leonard also knowingly deceives himself into false beliefs by exploiting his notes to himself. By writing "Don't believe his lies" on the back of a Polaroid of Teddy, he sets in motion the chain of beliefs that will lead him to mistake Teddy for John G__—although he knows at the time he decides to write these words that Teddy played no part in the assault on Catherine.

Leonard has furthermore insured that he'll remain in perpetual pursuit of further phantom-John G__'s by leaving blank a space on his chest previously reserved for reminding him that he's secured his revenge. As we see in a late flashback to a moment prior to Catherine's death, Leonard did in fact acquire that very tattoo after finding and killing the true John G__. It read "I've done it"—and Leonard must since have had it removed, presumably after the accidental overdosing of Catherine placed him on the path to the California state mental institution where we see him in another crucial momentary flashback.

Only through an intense regimen of deliberate repetitions has Leonard conditioned himself to believe in a version of his past life which is substantially untrue. As Teddy points out to him, the story of Sammy Jankis has gotten "better every time [Leonard] tell[s] it." The same goes for Leonard's pursuit of a replicating sequence of false John G__s. And for the re-engineered history of Leonard's marriage, via the process Teddy describes to him succinctly as "Conditioning yourself to remember. Learning by repetition." Leonard has gotten good enough at the game of deliberate self-deception that he can now even improvise. We see him "explain" the luxury car he's just acquired from Jimmy Grantz as the fruits of his wife's life insurance policy.

But Leonard's rationalizations of his "system" can't fend off Teddy's insight: "So, in your grief, you wandered into a Jaguar dealership?" Another bitter joke occurs when Leonard slams a door on the head of an anonymous motel guest. Playing behind this spectacle of collateral damage is a broadcast touting used-car prices and monthly loan rates. Another media report notes the failure of U.N. troops to intervene in the ethnic massacres of Srebenica. Taken together, the film's background commentaries on the run-of-the-mill violence of the political economy suggest that its damaged hero's "condition" is less neurological than moral.

Memento's Leonard Shelby has learned to use his condition as an opportunity for evasion of moral responsibility. He blames John G__ for "destroying [his] ability to live." (Hearing this, Teddy feels Leonard's pulse and shrugs "You're living.") Leonard blames the assault for his loss of new memories, but he himself exploits the condition to rewrite old ones. In short, the deformations of Leonard's moral character—greed and ambition, a tendency to quick and often murderous violence, even a certain bloodthirstiness—have embraced his condition and turned him into a spectacularly effective serial killer. And this is possible precisely because he's found the means not to have to live with the knowledge that this is what he has become. "You're not a killer," Teddy tells Leonard ironically, before pinching his cheeks and grinning "That's why you're so good at it!"

Leonard's penchant for denial, deceptions, and damaging assaults on others long predate the blow which damaged his brain. He worked, after all, as an investigator for the medical insurance industry. Leonard was the kind of bright asshole who got ahead by screwing vulnerable clients on technicalities—a higher-class version of Burt, the commerce-savvy Discount Inn clerk who, together with his boss, justifies renting Leonard multiple rooms because "business hasn't been that good." The almost-always mendacious dialogue and the often-violent action of *Memento* are set against the background of everyday hucksterism and casual indignity that distinguish a business-run society.

Leonard's job was to secure his employer grounds for declining to indemnify their clients' claims. His

raises, bonuses, and elevation to less unsavory positions in the corporate hierarchy depended upon his performance in denying payment: "[Sammy's] wife got stuck with the bills and I got a big promotion," Leonard remembers. Apologists for this miserable little slice of the privatization of suffering for the sake of stockholder profit will point out that insurance fraud runs rampant, raising everyone's premiums. They'll insist that the industry's integrity depends upon aggressive pursuit of fraud. Even setting aside the fact that the frequency and cost of medical fraud in countries with single-payer health coverage is dwarfed by that of the American system, Leonard's tale of Sammy Jankis is one of company fraud, not client fraud. Sammy's condition was perfectly genuine, Leonard believes, yet he succeeded in sustaining a question of doubt sufficient to rationalize his firm's refusal to settle. Leonard comforts himself with the thought that his investigation never explicitly concluded that Sammy was faking. No, Leonard tells himself, all he did was use the results of a cruel "conditioning test" to open up a distinction between "physical" and "mental" causes because Sammy's policy excluded the latter. When Leonard indignantly asks Natalie, "What do you think I am? I'm not gonna kill someone for money," we should remember that Leonard's employer had hired him to do just that.

Evaluating the significance of a film hero's character in the context of his choice of profession is no more arbitrary than doing so for a real human being. Filmmakers don't need to signal any explicit interest in order to make this part of their film's story. But Christopher Nolan has taken care to offer such signals about Leonard Shelby's career. Leonard and Teddy argue several times about Leonard's investigative skills. The former cop addresses Leonard sarcastically as "Sherlock," and draws Leonard's ire by describing him as "selling insurance" rather than as an investigator. We'll recall too that Teddy had given Leonard a complete police file, without missing pages or black-outs; Leonard's confidence in his flawed "system" is exposed as prideful self-deception long before Teddy confirms it.

But the most important clue to the fraudulence of Leonard's self-image as victim comes from poor Sammy himself. We see three iterations of Sammy's conditioning test, and each time he suffers a nasty shock from the same electrified geometrical solids. Each time we see him react just the same. I don't mean just that he gets pissed off every time. I mean that Sammy displays *exactly* the same facial expression, extends his middle finger to the doctor at *precisely* the same pace and position while speaking the *identical* words with identical intonation and speed. The defrauded insurance customer's defiant curse—"Well, test this, you fucking quack!"—echoes through *Memento* like a refrain, but in fact it's a literal frame-by-frame repetition.

Nolan could hardly have produced a more tightly emblematic indictment of misery-turned-for-profit than the test performed on Sammy by the insurance-company doctor. Of course the perfect consistency of Sammy's reply also tells us that there was really only one instance of Sammy taking the conditioning test. That single instance is repeated over and over by *Leonard*, who invented it and has turned it into a false memory through his self-conditioning routine. What's happening here is that Leonard is actively rewriting his past so that it will conform to his preference for seeing himself as innocent and righteous. He likewise prefers thinking of his profession as a kind of public service, an analogue of honest police work or medical diagnosis.

Leonard was a bad man prior to the assault on Catherine, a man content to use his ingenuity and ambition to cheat clients out of settlements they deserved. And Leonard remains a bad man throughout *Memento*, one who finds his new life's meaning in the debased morality of revenge, who actively works to transform himself into a less and less responsible moral being, and whose illusions so fully replace any accurate memory of the past that he can go on killing with less and less remorse or self-understanding. Leonard transforms himself into a killing machine, ever in search of fresh victims upon whom to wreak vengeance for a murder that never occurred. He has invented revenge as a blanket motive, and he uses it to meet the need for meaning in his life—presumably in response to the guilt of having killed his wife himself. Projecting his guilt holds Leonard Shelby together, but at the cost of a mounting pile of corpses.

One of the last lies we hear Leonard Shelby tell is "I'm not a killer . . . but right now I need to be." The confusion of movie critics who failed to recognize that Leonard successfully conditions himself to acquire new *long-term* memories (and to rid himself of others) has surely been suborned by the degree to which a similar dynamic operates in U.S. cultural life more generally. The four nicknames Teddy uses for Leonard draw from a familiar Anglo-American cultural lexicon: "Pocahontas," "Sherlock," "Einstein," and "Leibowitz." Each alter ego comments ironically on an aspect of Leonard's identity: there's a Native American princess best known for helping out a colonial Captain, Arthur Conan Doyle's cocaine-dependent ur-P.I., an emigrant icon of the scientist turned celebrity, and a famed glamour photographer. Those files Leonard possesses—blacked out

beyond recognition—look a lot like heavily-censored government documents. *Memento* gives us a memorable sight-gag commenting on the relationship between firepower and ideology, when Leonard opens a drawer where he knows he'll find a Gideon's Bible—and finds a pistol lying on top of it. Earlier in the film, Leonard flips briefly through another Gideon's, evidence (as he instantly recognizes) that he's awakened in an American motel room. His fingers catch in the book of Leviticus, notorious for endorsing the ethic of an eye for an eye, for its obsessively-detailed restrictions on sexuality, and for its endless pronouncements on diet and conduct. Right beside the bed pillows, militant fundamentalism rears its head. The tattoo on Leonard's left tricep reading "Memory is treachery" hints as well at the political valence of his condition.

For *Memento* asks us to contemplate truths that are not merely ugly but buried. "You don't know who you are," Teddy tells Leonard in disgust, "Let's go down to the basement, you and me, and I'll show you who you are." What Leonard would be shown underground is that he's a murderer—but Leonard doesn't want to know, and he blows Teddy's brains out instead. What *was* Leonard Shelby? A merely compliant and uncritical beneficiary of a rotten business practice. What he has become is a hands-on mass-murderer. In an unusually frank gloss on Santayana's often-quoted but little-understood dictum on the forgetting of history, *Memento* demonstrates that those condemned to repeat history are condemned to enact their own criminal participation in its horrors.

Memento is largely set in the drab and anonymous rooms and lobbies of cheap motels, in parking lots, in an Anytown's seedy bars and featureless coffee shops. The neighborhood where Leonard discovers that he's not chasing Dodd but being chased (and shot at) by Dodd is a trailer park. These are the now-familiarly low-tragedy environs of men who use aggressively diminutive nicknames—salesmen like Arthur Miller's Willie Loman and David Mamet's real estate hawkers (Shelley and Ricky in *Glengarry Glen Ross*) and con artists (Joey and Mike in *House of Games*). Teddy and Natalie insist on identifying Leonard Shelby with this world, calling him by the nickname he hates. *Memento*'s calamities are those of small-time grifters, but its narrative hints over and over at the broader ills of a culture where powerful ideological institutions devote huge resources to discouraging residents from acquiring or retaining any significant historical memories.

Listening to Christopher Nolan discuss the remarkable formal innovations of *Memento,* one might suppose that his aim was merely to deliver a year-2000 noir insurance-man as tough and yet as vulnerable as Walter Neff, the protagonist of Billy Wilder's 1944 *Double Indemnity*. (Admittedly, no slouching ambition.) The excitement with which audiences responded to the challenge of sorting through Nolan's pairings of color and black-and-white sequences, looped narration, and re-contextualizing of key moments should encourage other filmmakers to recognize the power of form to deepen and reinforce theme. But it remains the central contention of this review that *Memento* is not primarily a formalist triumph. On the contrary, Nolan's great achievement lies in the unsparing use of formal devices of first-person characterization to expose flawed moral character. Leonard Shelby's murder of Teddy Gammell, committed right before our eyes in the film's opening moments, is being made okay with us. Like the representation of so many other horrific killings executed within range of our view (and, very often, in justice's name and so in ours), mass media's form remains its fatalistic message.

A memento is a keepsake, something that recalls a significant person or experience—a snapshot, a handwritten note, a treasured trinket. There's dark humor in choosing a term that has such positive connotations to title a film so full of revealed horrors about the falsification of memory. Leonard, as we learn, keeps mementos of his wife Catherine only in aid of his effort to destroy unwanted memories about her. But the full resonance of this title kicks in only when we remember that it's a partial echo of the title of Jonathan Nolan's story, "Memento Mori." This Latin phrase meaning "Remember death" is used by art historians to describe paintings in which skulls, short-lived candleflames, and cut flowers encourage contemplation of life's fragility, brevity, and moral weight. With his usual elegance and economy, Christopher Nolan cut the term "Mori" from his film's title—erasing death but reminding us with acute postmortem clarity, in the imperative voice, of what we prefer to forget.

That chill we feel is a body's heat, already draining away.

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Abstract The impaired short-term memory of *Memento*'s American Everyman hero wins our sympathy, but his deliberate exploitation of his "condition" gradually earns our suspicion as well. Leonard Shelby is a genuine victim, but he's also criminally violent, profoundly deceived, and haunted by unwelcome memories. So as the film's reverse-order narration unwinds, displaying his willful revision of long-term memories about his marriage, profession, and motives, we should likewise rewind and revise our initial sympathy.

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PART ONE

Ambient Television

Visual Culture and Public Space

By Anna McCarthy. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001. $54.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Perhaps one of the more surprising and entrenched conventions of serious inquiries about television has been the historic tendency to presume that television is a rather singularly domestic medium. In the U.S. context of humanistic academic scholarship (as opposed to popular television and series histories, and to social scientific academic traditions which emphasize viewer-text relations and "effects" analysis), most analyses of television consider the medium in regard to its place in the home, and/or are dedicated to reading the images of television programs, advertisements, and the larger organization of its commercial address and program scheduling through which particular "eyeballs" are delivered to advertisers as regards viewing relations within the home. These studies of television's domestic place and the images offered up there—though absolutely essential to any understanding of the medium and its relationship to larger cultural ideology and struggles—only footnote the medium's equally long and vital history as a public medium. And yet, what of television's *public* negotiation of and dialogue with such ideology and struggles? While there have been notable exceptions to this elision (as seen, for example, in Michelle Hilmes' thorough history of theater television in her *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable,* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), Anna McCarthy's *Ambient Television* is the first book-length scholarly history and critical interrogation of television in public space. McCarthy is explicitly interested in the presence of television within the everyday locales we traverse outside of our homes—the "ambient" as that which surrounds us but typically goes unexamined. In this sense, *Ambient Television* is already a groundbreaking work. But beyond this, it is a terrific achievement as an ambitious and successful interrogation of larger, institutional dynamics and corporate interests behind out-of-home television ventures while it simultaneously offers detailed analysis of the "micro"-level practices of public television and its engagement by viewer-consumers. McCarthy's project is aligned, in this way, with cultural studies, focusing on the everyday-ness of television outside the home as a key site through which to examine "the power politics of spectatorship and commerce in contemporary public space" (1). Here, McCarthy is directly responding to and writing against prevailing academic and popular press dismissals of sites such as the theme restaurants and corporate logo stores she examines as "placeless," generic, and therefore evacuated of any kind of engagement or agency other than a diffuse top-down global consumer logic. *Ambient Television* argues, instead, that every site has a specific set of flows and negotiations that exist between industrial rhetoric and intent, the televisual apparatus(es), the architectural design of the larger space, the navigation and use of the people within that space, and its real geographic location in a particular historical moment.

Ambient Television is characterized by careful archival research and reconstruction of site-specific uses of television through an examination of trade industry journals and magazines (including references such as *Beverage Media, Display World, Sporting Goods Business*), popular press sources, and the papers of the Allen B. DuMont Collection from the

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Smithsonian Institution. McCarthy also uses archival and contemporary photographs of the sites she analyzes in order to read the different operations of television in relation to its viewer/users at each site. Throughout, the author's theoretical influences are multiple—drawing on works from media history and theory, critical cultural geography, and anthropology. And yet, she draws upon thinking across these fields in a very focused way—specifically, to clearly define terms that, while often invoked, have tended to remain vague in their application. McCarthy interrogates and amplifies the terms "scale" and "place" in order to emphasize that it is only in the relationship or intersection between scales (the macropolitical and the micropolitical) that we can begin to study cultural agency in relation to the TV screen. Borrowing from theorists ranging from Neil Smith and Bruno Latour to Samuel Weber and David Harvey, McCarthy argues that what is at stake in studying television in public is the relationship of "flows" between institutional/corporate intention, spatial architecture/the sculptural relation of television to its space of display, and the actions/reactions/or inattentiveness of those who move through or wait in those spaces. This is a relationship of flows that is characterized by sharp differentiation between sites and/as based on place-specificity, historic influences, larger social concerns of the period, and the slippage between institutional and/or corporate intent and the practice of bodily occupying a space.

McCarthy's introduction is followed by case studies of representative sites of television in public space. These case studies include, among others, the neighborhood tavern of the 1940s and the present, the department store of postwar America, "out-of-home networks" common to contemporary sites of travel and waiting (such as the airport and the waiting room itself), as well as the spatio-temporal and sculptural uses of television ranging from key examples of locally bound public video art projects to familiar and yet equally "localized" commercial venues such as Footaction and NikeTown. While McCarthy's project is not strictly chronological in its organization, her case studies are carefully placed in historical context. For example, McCarthy analyzes the neighborhood tavern of the 1940s as a site of public TV through careful analysis of the beverage industry's trade rhetoric, sports marketers' concerns, neighborhood class configurations, tavern seating and viewing protocols, and gender- and generation-inspired disputes as each intersected with reformist movements of the period. McCarthy follows up this archival work with a present-day analysis of one of the taverns, Starr Tavern of Jersey City, NJ, based on a visit and analysis of the contemporary space.

Arguably, in the current climate of increased conglomeration and corporate concentration it is even more important that scholars speaking from academic environments be historically savvy and critically aware of industrial strategies, discourses regarding public space, television, and consumer relations. *Ambient Television* invites further questions along these lines—ranging from how these theses apply to sites outside of the advanced, Western capitalist context to how they might inflect considerations of the ever-expanding role of large-screen video displays at sporting events, community festivals, concerts and the like. *Ambient Television* is a cultural study of the very best sort: specific and grounded in its analyses of actual sites, critically sophisticated and theoretically original in its attention to the power politics of the everyday, and provocative in its encouragement that readers think through how its arguments apply to a multitude of other contexts, in other places, across time.

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At Full Speed

Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World

Edited by Esther C.M. Yau. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. $49.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

At Full Speed is an exemplary collection of essays on Hong Kong Cinema. The cover image of Brigitte Lin as Invincible Asia in the rapid-fire accelerated world of *Swordsman II* appropriately complements the content of this collection. Edited by one of the major scholars of New Chinese Cinemas, it contains accessible readings divided into three main sections: Hong Kong's New Wave Cinema; Action, Entertainment, Aesthetics, and Reinventions; and A Culture of Disappearance: Nostalgia, Nonsense, and Dislocation.

Yau's editorial introduction speedily introduces the reader to a cinema associated with a new age of globalization where motion is a key factor in many works which "follow a fast-paced rhythm in terms of shot length, dialogue duration, bodily movements, and use of multiple ellipses within scenes" (3) engaging in a "high-speed race for profit against the barriers of time and distance." (4) Alert to relevant cultural, economic, gender, technological, and post-industrial factors influencing this cinema of the 80s and 90s, Yau provides a relevant perspective for understanding a cinema whose "inauthentic" productivity mirrors Hollywood and appropriately criticizes the double standard whereby Western referential appropriations are deemed creative while similar Eastern practices involving "experimental syncretism" (10) are regarded as "derivative and inauthentic." (8) Despite only referring to some interesting recent productions such as Johnny To's *The Mission* and Ringo Lam's *Victim* (both 1999), which could have been the subject of monographs in themselves, Yau has wisely decided to limit herself to the transcultural essays chosen for the collection.

Part One begins with a detailed "Overview of Hong Kong's New Wave Cinema" by one of the most respected critics from the former colony. Law Kar significantly refers to those formative preceding decades of the 50s and 60s. He notes that Lung Kong, who directed *Story of A Discharged Prisoner* (1967) and *Teddy Girls* (1969), was fascinated by the Soviet montage school as well as "the more subtle visual style of European films" (34). As Law Kar notes, many

of the future talents in Hong Kong Cinema owed much to TVB administrator Selina Chow. As usual, Law Kar's research provides stimulating insights for future research. Hector Rodriguez's "The Emergence of the Hong Kong New Wave" aptly complements Kar's article in its more academic investigation of "the relationship between culture and society and the identity of Hong Kong itself," (53) as well as in his recognition of the neglected work of Tang Shuxuan and the fact that future directors such as Allen Fong, Tsui Hark, Patrick Tam, and John Woo were key participants in the cine-club movement in terms of both publications and "dialogue with the critical community." (63)

"Aesthetics in Action: Kungfu, Gunplay, and Cinematic Expressivity" by that exemplary *sifu* from Wisconsin appropriately opens Part Two. As with his other essays in *Hong Kong Cinema* and elsewhere, David Bordwell stimulates the viewer to examine closely the specifics of a type of cinematic text which aesthetically contrasts with a now impoverished Hollywood model. Bordwell refers to the tendencies in this cinema as "*expressive* amplification because the emotional qualities are not presented laconically; the filmic handling magnifies them." (87) It is a practice far closer to Sergei Eisenstein than Steven Spielberg. Korean scholar Jinsoo An provides an interesting transcultural reading of John Woo's *The Killer* (1989) in terms of South Korean reception. But his comment concerning private readings in terms of cult film associations leading to "a pervasive lack of interest in textual coherence and serious thematics" (104) is debatable. Steve Fore's "Life Imitates Entertainment: Home and Dislocation in the Films of Jackie Chan" examines the changing nature of the star's films as they have become disappointingly "more diffuse and less emphatically tied to a specific cultural place" (117). This contrasts with the more culturally significant work of Tsui Hark interrogated by Stephen Teo in the next essay. Bhaskar Sarkar's "Hong Kong Hysteria: Martial Arts Tales from a Mutating World" intelligently argues for understanding the recent manifestations of this genre as being "cautionary tales of transnational alliances" (169) rather than cool postmodern artifacts "consumed without much understanding of the contexts in which they were produced." (159) Indeed, the supposedly redundant concept of modernity may provide a more relevant critical approach than the fashionable discourse once defined by the late Andrew Britton as belonging to "the bourgeois intelligentsia in the age of Reagan" (and beyond!) Elaine Yee-lin Ho persuasively argues for Ann Hui's more recent films renewing "the inspiration of modernity" in her essay, "Women on the Edges of Hong Kong Modernity: The Films of Ann Hui."

Part Three opens with Rey Chow's already familiar essay on Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* (1988), "A Souvenir of Love." Although appropriate in introducing essays dealing with nostalgia and dislocation, another essay in the vein of Linda Chiu-han Lai's "Film and Enigmatization: Nostalgia, Nonsense, and Remembering" could have been supplied. While recognizing a social element in postmodernism, she examines a type of Cantonese cinema related to a former colony which is "still deeply immersed in a sense of pride in its economic progress." (241) Her examination of the logic of nonsense embodied in comedian Stephen Chiau's Cantonese films is related to a cinema relevant only to "those residents who partake of everyday life and popular culture in the territory now." (242) Superbly abbreviated from a fuller version which originally appeared in *Postmodern Culture,* Gina Marchetti's "Transnational Exchanges, Questions of Culture, and Global Cinema: Defining the Dynamics of Changing Relationships" is an excellent examination of the films of Evans Chan, a director needing far more attention than he has so far received in the critical community. Complementing this significant essay, Kwai-cheung Lo's "Transnationalization of the Local in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1990s" offers a complex analysis of a key term in a relevant discourse first brought to our attention by Sheldon Lu. Lo argues that the "meaning of the Hong Kong local is always already overdetermined by the framework of the transnational that structures our perception of its reality." (263) With speed in mind, he offers interesting readings of well-known films such as Peter Chan's *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (1994) and *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (1996). But his most interesting observation is a reevaluation of the much maligned figure of Michael Fitzgerald Wong. He sees this actor as suggesting "the hybrid and multicultural nature of the local subject" in Gordon Chan's *The First Option* (1996). This section concludes with a queer reading of "The Intimate Spaces of Wong Kar-Wai," by March Siegel.

Concluding with glossary and relevant selected bibliography, *At Full Speed* represents a sterling contribution to the area of Hong Kong cinema studies. With many essays presenting potential areas for future development, it is an indispensable reference text. However, the lack of any detailed discussion of the post-1997 neo-noir gangster film such as *The Mission* and the bleak post-*Maximum Risk* (1996) Hong Kong films of Ringo Lam represents a problematic gap in this study (perhaps due to publication deadline rather than any fault of the editor).

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Cinema and the Second Sex

Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s

By Carrie Tarr with Brigitte Rollet. New York: Continuum, 2001. $89.95 cloth; $29.95 paper.

One of the most significant trends in film studies today is an increased interest in the work of women directors. Since the mid-90s, feminist film criticism has shifted its focus from theoretical analysis of the way in which mainstream cinema constructs women to the critical analysis of women filmmakers—in other words, from women as an object of the

camera to women as the subject of camera. *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* by Judith Mayne, *Margarethe von Trotta* by Renate Hehr, *Jane Campion* by Dana Polan, and *Alice Guy Blaché: Lost Visionary of the Cinema* by Alison McMahan are some of the recent full-length studies of female directors.

Despite the fact that the *auteur* approach to film has been much contested by the audience-oriented component of cultural studies, director studies seem to linger on and even show signs of resurgence in the form of a revised or broader concept of authorship that positions the director not as a visionary genius but, in a broader social context, as only one voice among many. More traditional auteur study is also breaking away from canonical male directors to examine non-mainstream, marginalized directors, such as women directors, Third World directors, and avant-garde directors who have more or less full control over their work.

French women have been directing films from the very beginning of cinema, with Alice Guy Blaché as the world's first woman director. However, in part because of French intellectual tradition and a male-dominated industry where French women have felt obliged to disclaim their gender, there has been a lack of recognition of French women directors. This was especially so in Anglo-American film studies. Fortunately, feminist film critics are making an ongoing effort to fill in the gaps by introducing studies on French women directors in English.

Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s also adds to the effort by offering a very detailed overview of French women directors and their works of the past two decades. Written by Carrie Tarr, the author of *Diane Kurys,* with the aid of Brigitte Rollet, the author of *Coline Serreau,* the book belongs to the new series of "Women Make Cinema" by the Continuum International Publishing Group. The series editors Pam Cook and Ginette Vincendeau introduce their new series as "a ground-breaking series dedicated to celebrating the contribution of women to all aspects of film-making throughout the world. Until recently, feminist criticism has focused on the exclusion of women from mainstream cinema, emphasizing the relatively small number of women directors and their restricted opportunities. *Women Make Cinema* assesses the historical impact of women as both producers and consumers of cinematic images."

Cinema and the Second Sex, which obviously borrows its title from Simone de Beauvoir's breakthrough book *The Second Sex,* focuses on the production side of filmmaking by assessing the impact of women's increased access to the film industry. As the title implies, the book draws on the fact that despite a surge in the number of women directors who are currently making some of the more significant films in France (according to the book, the number of French films directed or co-directed by women between 1990 to 1999 is 166, a 13.7% of the total production), they are still in many respects positioned as the "second sex." The book specifically emphasizes that it does not focus on individual women *auteurs* and that it does refer to the creative contributions of women other than directors, whether as screenwriters, producers, cinematographers or actresses. However, in reality, much of the discussion and analysis of the films center on directors as the major creative force.

Tarr and Rollet are very much aware of the implications of a study focusing only on films directed by women, "an approach which, arguably relies both on an auteurist approach to film and an essentialist approach to gender" (8). However, they argue that there is a particular rationale for taking authorship as a critical starting point in this case because "French national cinema is characterized by low-budget auteur films" (9) and women directors are also influenced by this tradition. In response to the potential essentialist critique, the writers contend that "our study is based not on the assumption of essentialist differences between men and women, but rather on the supposition that women experience different sets of social relations and discourses which potentially inflect their cinematic production"(8).

The book consists of two parts: personal films and genre films. "Part One: Personal Films" analyzes films by their subject matter and "Part Two: Genre Films" deals with the question of how women directors appropriate and/or subvert male-oriented genre films, such as comedies, crime dramas, road movies, and historical films, to incorporate feminist issues and to create new forms that deconstruct mainstream cinema. The genres most women directors of the 1980s and 1990s dealt with include growing-up films that depict the adolescent experience (many auto-biographical); so-called "the age of possibilities" films where women directors show the direct influence of May 1968 and the 1970s women's movement; films that deal with family and heterosexual relationships; and the films that incorporate issues of race and sexuality in the postcolonial cinema of North African French women directors.

The diversity of subject matter and the brief but solid analyses of the films provide us with an insight into the significance of gender at a particular moment in French film history. Instead of in-depth analyses of a few important works, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the history and range of women's filmmaking in 1980s and 1990s France. By doing this, the book fulfills one of its aims of addressing gaps and absences in the critical recognition of women's filmmaking in France, which has consistently been underrecognized and undervalued in general histories of French cinema. At the same time, the sheer wealth and diversity of films discussed (the book tries to cover as many films as possible that were produced during the 1980s and 1990s) does not escape the danger of distracting the attention of the readers, especially because many of the films discussed in the book are not yet available to English-speaking readers. Also, thematic classification inevitably leads to a fractured analysis of each film which interferes with a coherent and/or multi-layered reading of the film.

However, the book is instrumental in understanding the evolution of women's filmmaking within the context of French society because it successfully relates changes in women's filmmaking to changes in French society itself. The

book offers an insightful contrast between the 1980s and the 1990s by investigating the social factors that exerted a major influence in each of these decades. Thus, the book draws on the different social climate of each period, and examines the changes in key motifs from the 1970s to the 1990s within the historical context of French society. For example, the 1970s saw the end of "*les trentes glorieuses*" (the thirty years of glory) postwar prosperity and the start of economic crisis. The influence of politics was evident, and women's filmmaking was more or less concentrated in documentaries about women's lives and social issues.

The 1980s is defined as the period of "*cinéma du look*" (cinema of the spectacle) in which films rely more on their seductive visual appeal than on narrative or social realism. The book describes the 1980s as a regressive period in which the rise of Le Pen and the National Front resulted in right-wing conservatism in France and brought a backlash against the women's movement. Consequently, according to the book, women's filmmaking became increasingly depoliticized. Women directors were also influenced by the "*cinéma du look*," and they showed a fascination with sexual ambiguity not necessarily expressed from a female point of view. In addition, women's crime narratives proliferated, but not in a way influenced by feminism. The most significant development in popular French cinema was the historical film, identified as "heritage film" that produces a sense of national identity through nostalgic pleasures and offers escape from the anxieties of the present. Women directors made relatively low-budget historical films and documentaries about women's lives, and other social issues disappeared.

1990s women's filmmaking experienced the impact of postfeminism. The decade was marked by the growing recognition of the work of a generation of women directors who started making films in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This new generation of women filmmakers was born in the 1960s, studied in the prestigious FEMIS, and draws on a wide knowledge of film culture. In contrast with the apolitical 1980s, the mid-90s reflected a new awareness of France's deep social divisions, and documentary and essay films re-emerged as a significant aspect of "*le jeune cinéma français*" (young French cinema). "*Le jeune cinéma français*" of the 1990s is characterized by its concern for marginalized others within French society, and women directors associated with this new movement shifted away from the personal and domestic toward the representation of working-class women and young women suffering from unemployment.

The most interesting aspect of the book lies in its generational approach to directors and their films. It is interesting because the generational approach inevitably implies an auteuristic approach that places a certain amount of importance on the directors' personal experiences in shaping their work. The "post-68 generation" tended to explore alternative ways of living and to seriously investigate gender and sexuality. Many films that dealt with the problems of the heterosexual couple have been made by this generation of women, which lived through May 1968 and the subsequent failure of feminism in France. The 1980s "*cinéma du look*" generation became increasingly disillusioned by politics and became more or less apolitical, whereas the 1990s "*le jeune cinéma français*" generation of women filmmakers actively engaged in depicting social issues and the lives of working-class women. Thus, *le jeune cinéma français* women directors appropriated popular genres to focus on women's experiences, issues of identity, and social problems.

However, the book points out that all through the history of women's filmmaking in France, lesbianism is still rare and undervalued and the book gives a possible explanation for this in the specificity of a French intellectual tradition that discourages women from claiming their gender specificity. Although the book focuses on textual analysis rather than on directors, this generational approach gives us the sense that not only the texts but also the creators of the texts work within and are constructed by their social contexts.

Cinema and the Second Sex is a valuable contribution to feminist film criticism, especially in its offer of a wide range of information on women' filmmaking in France not before widely available to English-speaking readers. The book will be a useful guide to those who are interested in French cinema, women filmmakers, and feminism. Ideally, it will be a stepping-stone in narrowing the gap between French and English-speaking film scholars. It will also be useful to those who are interested in the industrial aspect of filmmaking since the book provides specific figures and numbers of films, box office records of each year and also a complete list of all films made by French women during the 1980s and 1990s. For general readers, the book's overview of the history of women's filmmaking in France will be a useful companion for further study of feminist issues, feminist film theory and women's cinema.

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Close Up

Iranian Cinema: Past, Present and Future

By Hamid Dabashi. London, New York: Verso, 2001. $70.00 cloth; $20.00 paper.

The project and publication of *Close Up* may well be viewed as symptomatic of an academic legitimacy that Iranian cinema has gradually gained, propelled by the international attention to a number of films from Iran that have garnered critical acclaim and festival prizes around the world. *Close Up* is also another voice in the recent surge of debates and publications that address the question of cinema's relation to nation, aiming to unpack the complex relationship of national cinema and the global context within which the local film culture and industry must position themselves.

In a square format, with a small low-angle image of a veiled woman standing under rays of sunlight piercing

through a stained glass window on the book cover, and with tasteful selection and placement of high resolution film stills and photos on the solid and smooth white pages of the book, *Close Up* at first glance seems to be an art book rather than a serious text with academic cachet endorsed and praised by Edward Said on the back and on the cover.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The four middle chapters, which are focused principally on select filmmakers and their films, are sandwiched between sections with wider historical and theoretical interests that dwell "On Modernity and the Making of a National Cinema" in the first, and grapple with "The Perils and Promises of Globalization" in the last chapter. In the first chapter, Hamid Dabashi paints a panoramic view within which he places the recent history of Iran's intellectual and cultural developments in the context of the struggle with colonial powers and despotic rulers, which altogether prevent the formation of an autonomous national bourgeoisie, and which place the country in a disadvantaged position within the global logic of capitalism. The historical experiment of modernity fails because of this repression of the Iranian subjectivity and the colonial regression of Iran's economic autonomy. This subjection is exasperated by Iran's strategic geographic position and rich oil resources that place it amidst the rivalry of colonial powers. Extrapolating from this panorama, Dabashi proposes a unique framework to conceptualize the *national* cinema. Iranian cinema, while also a record of this historical failure, at its best, succeeds in "resubjecting the Iranian self where the project of modernity has failed" (13).

It is in this very spirit of attending to the subjective that Dabashi narrates memories of his personal encounter with cinema in the introductory chapter, interjecting, in other words, a subjective narrative and a narrative about subjectivity into cinema's history in Iran. The liberating joy and possibilities that this magical medium offered the young Dabashi in his neighborhood-world gave him a ground to resist, perhaps only in fantasy, the harsh discipline of Iran's paternalistic educational system. Yet, the volatile medium would not cater to the young boy's innocence and excitement with the new. The chilling thrill of assembling a projecting apparatus soon gave in to an explosion as the film caught fire. Before initiating the book's chapters, Dabashi brings his introduction to a close with this incident of creativity disturbed—as though pre-staging an allegory for the thrills and disappointments of the powerful, exhilarating, and unpredictable medium of cinema for Iranians.

Dabashi does not explain the logic of focusing the majority of his study on the few "key" filmmakers he deals with in separate chapters, nor does he clarify the reason for the order of their appearances. While this emphasis on established filmmakers implicates a leaning towards an auteurist perspective, that is, privileging art cinema and the individual craft and vision of the director above and beyond the nation and the industry, the placement of Abbas Kiarostami ahead of others indicates a nod to the European art community's caliber. This predilection is also apparent in the book's title, which references Kiarostami's film, *Close Up* (1990). If the auteurial tendency of the book is discernible in the focus and order of chapters, it also unwittingly suggests an unresolved stance towards the question of gender.

In the sixth chapter, titled "In the Speculum of the Other: The Feminine Figure of Modernity," Dabashi traces accomplishments of women artists and activists to foreground their creative assaults against the "colonially militated modernity" (222). Dabashi's discussion acknowledges the contribution of these women in re-subjecting the Iranian self. As the chapter ultimately implies, the audacious efforts of these women aimed precisely against the marginal and sweeping positioning of their multiple voices and causes. However, this discussion is enclosed in a single chapter, disassociating, for the most part, the feminist spirit of this chapter from the rest of the book. The sixth chapter eventually zooms in on the oeuvre of one woman, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad. Unlike her male colleagues that garnered a focused treatment in the previous chapters, Bani-Etemad does not quite receive an individual attention by the chapter's generalized title and overall approach. Subjecting her to a string of remarkable women that preceded her contributions, Dabashi's discussion at first seems to equate the gender of the filmmaker with her feminist mission. Later though, the discussion unshackles itself from a gender concentration to offer a more inclusive and multidimensional critique of Bani-Etemad's socially conscious and compassionate cinematic vision.

In the chapter on Kiarostami, Dabashi extends his grand narrative of Iran's intellectual and artistic history to contextualize the world into which Kiarostami grew. This historical view is here arranged through close-ups of separate decades from the fifties, the decade in which Kiarostami was born, to the nineties, although by the eighties this discussion fades in its historical specificity and critical angle. In a sense then, Kiarostami becomes the hook to historically frame Iran's cultural narrative and to elucidate the cinema's ascent, since the late eighties, to surpass poetry's creative momentum and its place in the intellectual and artistic sphere of Iranian society. Dabashi covers an entire corpus of Kiarostami's works with a perceptive and creative reading of most of his titles. He later sidesteps from this contextual history and focused interpretation in, for example, the chapter on Makhmalbaf.

Entirely based on an interview with the filmmaker, the fifth chapter thins out in depth and relevance and instead becomes a free forum for Makhmalbaf to voice his personal opinions and tastes about a number of random topics, as varied as Makhmalbaf's depreciation of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and his anecdotal diagnoses of Iranian culture. It takes over twenty pages from the chapter's beginning before the discussion moves away from Makhmalbaf's memories of childhood, his activities during youth, and extended comments about his published essays and stories to finally turn to his involvement with cinema after the 1979 revolution. If this shift of framework and methodology between the second and the fifth chapters seems rather abrupt, the inconsistencies among the director-focused studies become progressively sharper.

In the third chapter, an engaging and perceptive excavation of the mythological underpinnings of Bahram Beiza'i's cinema follows a thought-provoking interview with the veteran filmmaker. From this fruitful exchange between Dabashi and Beiza'i emerge intriguing questions, such as the viability of tracing a history of visual and performing arts to assess the impact of these traditions on the contemporary culture and on cinema. In fact, it is here that the potential for an antithesis to Dabashi's underlying tendency to trace something uniquely, if not essentially, Iranian and historically verifiable in the Iranian cinema grows. The challenging spark comes when Dabashi asks if Beiza'i would characterize Iran's preceding traditions of visual arts as perhaps the antecedent of Iranian cinema. "No. . . . There does not have to be a specific historical precedent within the country for everything we do in Iran," Beiza'i responds (81).

Dabashi's project of conceptualizing Iranian cinema in terms of its success or failure to reinvent, imagine, or negotiate the Iranian subject is first applied to his discussion of Kiarostami's films, whose cinema "is actively engaged in teasing out assumptions underlying the Iranian subject" (62). The constitution of the subject becomes differently formulated in Beiza'i's chapter as Dabashi attempts to trace a new hermeneutics of subjectivity through re-mythologizing of the real in Beiza'i's cinema. For Beiza'i, cinema is "a kind of modern mythmaking" (89) and for Dabashi the auteur can act as a conduit for the culture in communication with its mythical subconscious (91).

Like both Kiarostami and Beiza'i, Bahman Farmanara began his film career prior to the 1979 revolution. Farmanara, who left the country at the time of the revolution and got involved in film distribution and exhibition in North America, returned to Iran in the nineties and eventually turned back to filmmaking about twenty years after his last Iranian production. *Close Up* is not concerned with the debilitating or liberating possibilities of filmmaking in exile, an interesting challenge to drawing the national or nation-state's contours of the Iranian cinema. An inclusion of a discussion, for example, with or about the New York-based Amir Naderi, who has a notable body of work in Iran, whose international recognition preceded Kiarostami, and whose filmmaking efforts far from home faded in oblivion, would have made a productive contribution, if not a counterpoint, to problematize the horizons of the *Iranian* cinema.

In the fourth chapter, some soft-focused background information about the contemporary situation of filmmaking in Iran emerges in bits and pieces. Dabashi's approach to the cinema before the 1979 revolution takes on a different narrative shape. The geo-political, sociological and artistic contexts that are emphasized for the pre-1979 era do not continue to the present, giving way to little developed discussions about cinema's surpassing of poetry and the literary tradition in recent years along with sketchy information about the politics and logistics of film production in Iran.

Although the title of the book or its chapter headings may suggest otherwise, one should not expect *Close Up* to engage in a thorough historiography of cinema in Iran nor to put into perspective any of its industrial, institutional and economic components. The book would have lent itself better to serious readership if it contained a subject index and bibliography at the end along with the select filmography that it offers. The discussion does not maintain a consistent treatment of "past, present, and future"—even if one could discern where past, present, or future is approximately located. Nevertheless, the project of reading the Iranian cinema as a site of the nation's preoccupation with refashioning its subjectivity is a compelling thesis worthy of serious exploration. In a fascinating turn, Dabashi eventually diagnoses the perils of globalization in terms of the collapse of the filmmaker's "ego," perhaps an unfortunate extension of their subjectivity turning self- rather than other-centered, onto the "public persona of their nation at large" (247). Bloated into star personas, some of these directors who still seek to maintain the outmoded role of the public intellectual assume that they can do just about anything. The perils of globalization therefore refers to an egotistic inflation and virtual entrapment in nativism—that is, internalizing the colonizing "gaze of the First at the Third world" (255).

Dabashi's intriguing discussion in the last chapter slashes into ossified viewpoints that do not detect much difference between today's globally/festivally embraced films from nations at the periphery, and the aesthetic and ideological otherness that Third Cinema, for instance, once presented to the world in the sixties and seventies. Dabashi proclaims that "once essential to the restoration of a sense of national dignity to the colonial subject," nativism has now lost its aesthetic creativity and ideological potency (257). In fact, its continued adoption is seen as artistically harmful and unforgiving. As Dabashi demonstrates through a reading of Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* (2000), nativism is symptomatic of the director/intellectual's blindness to "the global configurations of power" and to how it translates into local forms of colonialism (257). The compelling rationale and innovative voice of Dabashi diminish in plausibility and clarity when he discusses the emancipatory promises of globalization as belonging to the post-ideology generation of young Iranian filmmakers who have recently been featured and prized in film festivals. For those that have seen the fascination of Samira Makhmalbaf's camera with the poor and the illiterate in *The Apple* (1998) and with the Kurds in *The Blackboard* (2000) the assumption that these films simply abandon nativism seems rather odd.

Dabashi's pondering on individual films is informed and creative, particularly when he ties textual analyses to a contextual critique. At times, though, the discussions indulge in so much critic(al)ism that they lose a much-needed specificity and lack an evaluative barometer. Akin to a self-righteous paternal figure categorically throwing "popular" taste out of the window, Dabashi shakes his moral stick at the "nauseating clichés" of Iranian melodramas that cater to the "basest instincts of a mass audience" (43). His characterization of the fifties and the sixties commercial films and melodramas as "nightmare" and "plaque" would have been

more fruitful and less patronizing if accompanied by some qualification and precision.

Dabashi's book implies an epistemic position that is both privileged and precarious. His discussion throughout is engaging and useful, particularly for those "foreign audiences" whose access to the Iranian cinema and culture is limited to exported films and journalistic reports and criticisms. However, his insider position occasionally assumes unquestioned collective reference to "us" and to "our" history and culture, leading to deprecating moments of cultural diagnosis or surreptitious celebrations. Further, an academically nuanced and theoretically disposed lens often distances Dabashi's discussion from the realities of national politics and the global commerce of cinema, etching a hierarchy of the best and the worst relying merely on aesthetic and philosophic exposition.

Dabashi's language is for the most part poetic and subtle, occasionally oscillating between heart-felt compassion and an unexpected irony. His critiques and his narratives of the socio-cultural and intellectual histories are learned and engaging, particularly when he does not rely too much on terminologies familiar to readers of Gramsci, Habermas, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Kant, among many others. In spite of its limitations, *Close Up* is a unique, indispensable, and challenging venture, one that seeks to carve out its distinct voice and place by virtue of a versatile utilization of multiple frameworks and borrowing from various disciplines in order both to approach cinema in general and to make sense of Iran's cinema and its evolving culture in particular.

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Colonial Cinema and Imperial France 1919–1939

White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths

By David Henry Slavin. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. $42.50.

There can be few images in French cinema more enduring than the sight of Jean Gabin in *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, 1937) staggering down the steps of the Casbah toward the ship that carries his lover back to France, or Josephine Baker frolicking with sheep in the Tunisian outback in *Princesse Tam-Tam* (Edmond Gréville, 1935). The *cinéma colonial,* which rose to prominence in the 1920s and 30s, made stars of its key actors (Gabin, Annabella, Dalio, and Mireille Balin, among others) and consolidated the reputations of its directors (most notably Julien Duvivier, but also Jacques Feyder, Pierre Chenal, and Marcel L'Herbier). It embraced some of the most important film styles and genres of the period: the Foreign Legion film, the musical, and, most significantly, Poetic Realism, the precursor to American film noir. Colonial cinema has recently been the object of increasing attention from film scholars and cultural studies aficionados, but it has not, until now, been the focus of much historical research. In *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France 1919-1939,* historian David Slavin brings a welcome rigor to the analysis of this body of films, which are crucial for understanding not only French cinema and culture of this period, but also the considerable impact of the colonial legacy on contemporary French cultural and political life. (Witness the spectacular upheaval, felt across Europe, that was caused by the National Front's strong showing in the most recent presidential elections.)

Slavin's book considerably enriches the current body of scholarship in the field. His book asks, and answers, questions that film scholars have tended to gloss over in formalist or textual analyses, uncovering the political, financial, or often simply practical motivation for the images disseminated in these films, many of which were among the most popular of the time with French audiences. While many studies of colonial cinema either do not venture back beyond the early sound era, or treat the films of the interwar period as a homogeneous body of work, Slavin presents a nuanced account of the historical developments that led to transformations of the genre from the 1920s to the 1930s. The paternalism of 1920s adventure films gave way to more overtly racist depictions in the *cinéma colonial* of the 1930s, a change that Slavin attributes to the shift in preferred film location from Morocco, where natives had enjoyed a degree of relative cultural and political autonomy under the indirect rule of Marshal Lyautey, to assimilationist Algeria, where white settlers exerted much more influence, and demanded political and cultural supremacy. Even such generic developments as the decline in battle scenes from one decade to the next can be traced, Slavin argues, to pragmatic factors such as changing employment patterns that resulted in the decreasing availability of native extras. Also usefully elucidated here is the role of the Berber Myth in colonial films such as the epic *Itto* (Marie Epstein and Jean Benoît-Lévy, 1934), which encouraged audiences to identify with the supposedly European-like Berbers, who were presented as potential allies of the French colonial enterprise. No other book in English matches the depth of analysis provided in *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France,* and only one book in French comes close, Abdelkader Benali's *Le Cinéma colonial au Maghreb* (Cerf, 1998). Though perhaps at times more interpretively adventurous, Benali's book, by nature of its formalist approach, offers much less meat-and-potatoes historical contextualization than Slavin's. The two books actually complement each other very well.

Of course, exoticist films always show us much more about those doing the depicting than they show us about those being depicted, and as such, these films provide excellent insight into the assumptions and anxieties that informed French culture of the interwar period (and which continue to resonate today). For Slavin, racism is the product and the tool of class divisions, and racial and gender stereotypes in colonial cinema were sublimated expressions

of class conflict in metropolitan France and within French settler communities in the colonies. He is, however, quick to point out the French Left's complicity in the colonial project, notably the way in which the Popular Front used "racial and gender exclusivity" (166) to forge alliances among disenfranchised, working-class white men, alliances that were reflected in the colonial cinema of the period. As Slavin puts it: "Like the portrait of Dorian Gray, stereotypes allowed the French to attribute to Africa their own deformities and insecurities" (3).

The downside of the book's historiographical approach is the occasional tendency to lose sight of the films themselves, which are at times made to appear as pale reflections of larger historical forces; the conclusion, for example, makes no mention of cinema. On rare occasions, too, extended factual accounts of historical events can make for somewhat dry reading, but persistence is almost always rewarded with a greater understanding of the period and of the films themselves. Conversely, an interesting argument for a link between the two kinds of anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism on the one hand and anti-Arabo/Berberism on the other, floats intriguingly through the book, but is not developed much beyond the level of suggestion. In presentational terms, the book is not well served by a confusing system of annotation that lumps several sources together at a time. This was doubtless done by the publisher to save space, but it makes the references very difficult to trace, which is a shame considering that this book is aimed primarily at researchers and students. There are also many mistranscriptions of the French, some repetition of quotations, and a fairly high degree of typographical errors (the most memorable being "Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes/Quay of Frogs*"). On the bright side, though, when reviewers are reduced to picking out the typos in a book, it's almost invariably because they can't find anything else to criticize. Indeed, there is very little to criticize here, and much to celebrate.

Elizabeth Ezra, who teaches at the University of Stirling in Scotland, is the author of *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France,* and *Georges Méliès: The Birth of the Auteur*; she is also the editor of *European Cinema,* forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

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Early American Cinema in Transition

Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913

By Charlie Keil. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper.

Charlie Keil sets out to define transition-era cinema (that is, American movies from 1907 to 1913) as a period all its own with its own rules, taxonomy, and distinguishing stylistic characteristics. He wants to bracket off and highlight the era of developments in film fiction from what came before and after—the novelty of cinema (up until 1908) and the ascent of Hollywood feature films after 1913—in order to establish how aesthetic experimentation evolved into a coherent formal system that we today take for granted. He launches his study with refreshing candor and honesty regarding the stipulation of his approach—that he can classify films from this period within a developing national language of film form and style. The appeal of Keil's film formalism is that he will be able to establish a tight, hermetically sealed circle between production and the movies themselves that reassures us about the rise of an objective language and a national art form. He validates his enterprise by claiming that he has viewed a wide sample of films even while admitting there may be some "bias" (in the scientific use of the term) due to the fact that extant films may over-represent some film manufacturers over others.

His is a rather conservative approach to cinema in an era in which (1) most film histories reflect the influence of cultural studies for the ways that historical meaning occurs through the *interaction* between films and audiences and is influenced by the cultural and institutional frameworks acting on audiences; and (2) studies of *American* film history have increasingly challenged the term "American" in order to show how foreign films participated in building an American film culture and how American-made films were contextualized in other cultures. I do not mean to say that Keil is ignorant of such trends; he is not only aware of them, but cites them at both the beginning and end of his book. He simply adheres to an approach that champions meaning residing entirely in the object itself, a formalist model, and a belief in the scientific sample as the basis for claims of aesthetics. His approach is most associated with notable film scholars from the University of Wisconsin, especially David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. It should come as no surprise, then, that Keil studied at Wisconsin, that this volume was published by University of Wisconsin Press, and edited at the Press by Thompson. The book pursues a larger political agenda within the scholarly field of film studies that attempts to foreclose both the ways that meanings of films are also themselves historically changing, and the impossibility of any national exclusionary American model. This approach defends the politics of formalism against the successful encroachment of cultural studies and models of international hybridity in order to uphold the supremacy of the aesthetic object and a critical objectivity. While Keil displays thorough knowledge of his field throughout the book and singles out recent developments as praiseworthy, he still refuses to be swayed by them because he claims that they remain "outside" the parameters of his study. In this way, he elides the more fundamental problem that these very methods challenge the nature of how he constructs historical meaning.

That said, Keil offers the reader highly knowledgeable, thorough summaries of the film industry, largely dependent on extensive research conducted into the trade newspapers of the time period. He incorporates up-to-date scholarship of others who have written on film in this period. His book

should be popular with both students and general readers because his succinct overviews of the film industry and "the look" of the films offer easy-to-grasp rules about film form and a roadmap through the developing syntax of cinema—for example, editing, camera placement and movement, and mise-en-scène. He first works his way through the progressive experimentation that occurred in each of these formal elements, and then he tackles a representative group of film examples on a shot-by-shot basis (*The Boy Detective*; *The Forgotten Watch*; *Rose O'Salem-Town*; *Cupid's Monkey Wrench*; *Belle Boyd, a Confederate Spy*; and *Suspense*). His book is nothing less than a teaching primer for the ways that space and time are developed and progressively organized across several examples.

His primer, however, must necessarily omit discussion of music and sound, since these elements of film style were not part of the films themselves but were ephemeral aspects of the exhibition. While the "silent" period he covers incorporated a range of sound practices including music, spoken narration, and effects, he cannot attend to this enormously interesting component because his model insists on treating the films as "whole" in and of themselves. Similarly, he does not discuss the influence of the most aesthetically advanced fiction films at the beginning of the period he covers because they are foreign (the Pathé Frères films from France), nor can he assess the impact of the French *film d'art* movement or Italian masterpieces since he rigorously defends a national cinema based solely on domestic production.

Within the parameters that he sets, however, Keil broadens existing approaches to developing film aesthetics between 1908 and 1913. Earlier studies have tackled a single studio, genre, or director, but have never attempted wholesale generalizations across American film production. Keil fulfills his ambitions of charting the establishment of what would become Hollywood narrative style with easy-to-read prose, clear examples, logical argument, and thorough knowledge.

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The End of Cinema As We Know It

American Film in the Nineties

Edited by Jon Lewis. New York: New York University Press, 2001. $18.95.

One of the dangers of attempting to sum up a decade of film in one book (much less one review) is the tendency to see the forest instead of the trees. The mark of individual films can be flattened in sweeping generalizations stating, for example, that movies in the Eighties were about money, or that Fifties cinema was about post-war domesticity. For the most part, *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties* avoids this pothole. In his effort to encourage a wide range of essays, however, editor Jon Lewis occasionally loses the flow of the collection.

If we are to investigate these films as cultural artifacts, then the question is begged: what is Nineties culture? The book is organized in nine distinct sections, ranging from "Movies, Money and History" to "The End of Masculinity As We Know It," each housing four or five essays. While these signposts are helpful, they seem to be an afterthought when compiling the diverse contributions. The jigsaw puzzle that finally emerges is fascinating, but lacks a linear logic that would unify the collection more. Lewis admits that his call for contributions went out before the end of the decade, which can be problematic (4). The inherent problem in arranging essays on a temporal topic is that recent movie memory is always stronger. Lewis may as well have titled the book "The End of the *Decade* As We Know It." While the collection certainly benefits from multiple interpretation of films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Fight Club* (1999), and *The Matrix* (1999), one wonders if movies from the first half of the Nineties have been lumped in with Eighties cinema or simply ignored altogether. What about *Pulp Fiction* (1994)? *Unforgiven* (1992)? *JFK* or *Thelma and Louise* (1991)?

The conclusion that Lewis et al. seem to reach is that motion pictures at the end of the millennium are significant not for what we see in them, but how we watch them. If there's one movie that best exemplifies Nineties cinema by this definition, it could very well be *The Matrix*. Pat Mellencamp, at least, sees it as a "confluence of aesthetic and structural forms—theater, film, graphic arts, television, and computer games" (84). The computers-on, brains-off formula for Nineties cinema reception doesn't always translate into a box office bonanza (though let's face it, it often does), but it helps to explain why contemporary viewers are equally hypnotized by *Doom* (165) and dumber, such as Pamela and Tommy Lee's infamous "honeymoon" video (287).

American film in the 1990s seems to exist within a chicken-and-egg kind of scenario: Which came first, increasingly sophisticated stories or the technology to manifest them? If movies are "the convergence of money and culture, of commerce and art" (15), then what exactly is the end result? The essays that deal in some way or another with this irony are particularly interesting. Murray Pomerance's examination of the "restoration" of *Vertigo,* as well as Jan-Christopher Horak's business plan on studio archives, demonstrate that blood can indeed be squeezed from rocks, despite Pomerance's reminder that "restoring a story is not the same as retelling it" (48). After all, in Hollywood, if it works once, it'll work twice, or three times, or more.

In his concluding essay, Wheeler Winston Dixon offers a laundry list of "reasons why it's all over," some compelling,

some repetitious. But in maligning the "emptiness" of filmmakers such as George Lucas and Steven Spielberg and their privilege of "visuals over content, excess before restraint, spectacle rather than insight," Dixon ultimately gives us one of the most convincing (and succinct) descriptions of American film over the last ten years (361).

The bottom line of the collection is just that—the bottom line. Money is good. Technology is good. Or at the very least, these things are crucial in getting a picture off the ground and into theaters, much less the minds of moviegoers. Hollywood, if it's any surprise, is driven by what Thomas Elsaesser calls the "the successive moves to install and define the commodity 'film,' while at the same time extending and refining the service 'cinema'" (14). Even so-called independent film has been a casualty of merger mania. James Schamus, in his aptly titled essay "Rant," points out that even the "little guys need big capital if they are to survive in any economically viable form" (254). Producers and development execs who look at the world through green-tinted glasses have not been disappointed.

Dixon ultimately argues that despite too little pith and too many pratfalls, "the cinema will live forever" (365). But after reading *The End of Cinema As We Know It* I find myself increasingly puzzled by the definition of "cinema" here. If recent movies are to be criticized for taking mindless advantage of new technology, making money (gasp!), and encouraging the audience to suspend their disbelief not only in reality but also in the very images on the screen, then precisely what is cinema? And did it *ever* exist in Hollywood?

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The Fright of Real Tears

Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory

By Slavoj Zizek. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 2001. $65 cloth; $24.95 paper.

For a decade now, one of the many aims of the stunningly prolific Slovenian theorist and leftist cultural critic Slavoj Zizek has been to present the notoriously elusive and convoluted legacy of Lacanian theory in what would seem to be a perfectly lucid manner through a sustained engagement with (mostly) American popular narratives. In this regard, everybody's favorite quotable Zizek title—*Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992)—is exemplary of numerous other works. His latest offering could perhaps then appear a move away from earlier critical writings on film in several respects. First, the focus has become European art cinema, as Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski is his ostensible subject. And second, this subject also provides him an opportunity to wade into battle with the cognitivist opposition in Film Studies (or Post-Theorists) who would collapse Marxism-feminism-psychoanalysis-Cultural Studies into one giant (afflicted) branch of the field known as Theory.

As Zizek points out, for cognitivists, the central problem with Theory is that it still relies on a "psychoanalytic framework" at its root. However, he is clever enough to argue that the form of Lacanian psychoanalysis imported in the 70s had precious little connection to his own understanding of the theoretical tradition of Lacan. He points out that feminist film theorists only took what they wanted in piece-meal fashion and denied the rest as insufficiently attuned to the complexities of patriarchy (a point supported by the fractured development of psychoanalytic film theory. Zizek's implication is that almost all of the Lacanian "readings" produced by film scholars which the Post-Theorists would like to eliminate are reductive ones that have nothing in common with (his conception of) true Lacanian theory—leaving him in "between Theory and Post-Theory."

In joining this debate, Zizek is also afforded the opportunity to use psychoanalytic concepts as tools, not simply to explain the workings of narrative, but in newly expanded contexts, say, to undermine Post-Theoretical accounts of textual processes. As a result, the key question inevitably raised is: How successful is he operating within these new paradigms? One answer might be that, other than the engagement with the Post-Theorists, there is nothing particularly new here in terms of approach. Despite taking Kieslowski on as subject, Zizek continually cycles back to American films and narratives as anchor points for his arguments (Lynch, Coppola, *The Truman Show*, Philip K. Dick, etc.). And a particular intermingling of European and American culture has always been the true *objet petit a* for Zizek, hence his obsessive fascination with both Hitchcock and film noir. In addition, he may claim to be one of only a handful of psychoanalytic film theorists practicing utter fidelity to the Master, but his work has been, as often as not, about expanding Lacanian concepts rather than simply passing on dogmatic gospel. The deeper into *The Fright of Real Tears* one delves, the more frenetic, free-associative, and collage-like Zizek's style of argumentation becomes, and any synoptic account of the work as a whole is doomed to failure. Indeed, the promised engagement with the Post-Theorists is largely dropped after the earliest chapters. Nonetheless, Zizek's examination of Kieslowski's oeuvre does yield fruitful results on many fronts.

Kieslowski is positioned by Zizek as a filmmaker centrally focused on this inner tension of our experience with reality. There is, for example, the ghostly relationship in *Red* between a young model, Valentine, and the elderly, apparition-like, retired Judge. Valentine will, in fact, come to ponder if the Judge exists at all, de-realizing her own reality in order to make it more endurable. Just as important, though, for Zizek, is positioning Kieslowski's "fidelity to the Real" as the reason behind his shift away from the politically engaged documentaries of the 1970s toward fiction films later

in his career. Zizek uses Kieslowski's career arc and the problem of documentary subjects acting at "playing themselves" to argue it is only certain *fiction* features (late Kieslowski works like *Red, Blue*) which can achieve the Lacanian goal of portraying the notion that social reality is sustained by a symbolic fantasy, an achievement beyond the grasp of any documentary.

In exploring the enigmatic links that recur throughout Kieslowski's oeuvre—like recycling characters to serve as background in later *Decalogue* episodes or the reappearance of certain visual motifs—Zizek usefully applies the difference between the Freudian "symptom" (an element bearing a meaning to be interpreted) and a Lacanian "synthom" (a repetitive "tic" without any particular meaning guaranteed). It is the synthom which Zizek feels best applies to the eerie resonances in the Kieslowskian universe(s). And as a result, the director can be at least partially let off the hook of the charge of New Age obscurantist whose narratives have proposed all elements of existence to be connected by unseen forces—a point of view perhaps supported by a superficial reading of the *Three Colours* trilogy in which the protagonists of the three films and their lovers end up as the survivors of a catastrophic ferry crash at the conclusion of *Red*.

For Zizek, the concept of the synthom is connected to a larger reception-oriented question. In chapter five, "Run, Witek, Run," he raises the issue of whether it is liberating in films like *Blind Chance* or *The Double Life of Véronique* to see a number of alternative character histories depicted, or if it is ultimately a claustrophobic viewing experience in that all freedom of choice has been realized and every option has seemingly been presented. And it is at this point that Zizek's short-attention-span-theater-style of argumentation starts to become noticeably detrimental to the text. As the rest of the chapter becomes a monument to digression—touching on esoteric theories of quantum physics and the space-time continuum, the sexual mores in Cuba, impossible erotic talents of certain Hindu priests, as well as readings of a diverse sampling of texts by Neil LaBute, Goethe, Wagner, even *The Thornbirds*—the central "theme" of the chapter is rarely, if ever, touched upon. And since this leaves no time for any sort of argument to develop, by the beginning of the next chapter, the same question is merely rephrased, with Kieslowski's construction of alternate universes being labeled "thoroughly ambiguous" in offering both the prospect we may learn from a bad choice and sustaining the claustrophobic possibility of forever repeating these bad choices. Unfortunately, the pattern continues as the book progresses. The following chapter seems poised to put forward a decisive final analysis of Kieslowski's ontology: Is it simply to a New Age mysticism? Or does his "reign of chance" cinema push him closer to what Zizek holds up as a more Freudian view of the modern condition based on the "radical contingency" of Freud's notion of the symptom as unconscious wish attached to everyday encounters and events which are neither predictable nor interconnected. But again, by chapter's end, a number of digressions have left hardly time for any theorizing, and so the question is again reformulated as: Does Kieslowski's cinema pose the question of whether there is " . . . a deeper fate secretly regulating our lives, or is the notion of fate itself a desperate stratagem to cope with the utter contingency of life?" (107)

All of this is not to say I believe there is no place for the calculatedly eccentric, the circuitous, or the digressive within works of critical theory. Indeed, many such digressions are often the passages in a work that make the greatest impact and contain theoretical points which prove to be the most useful. But when the digressive meanderings mostly serve as a roadblock to the development of a sustained argument or an engagement with the ostensible subject matter, their value *is* often hard to discern. A final example from *The Fright of Real Tears* may better describe what is at stake in this particular instance. In the final chapter, Zizek forsakes the style just outlined above, much as in the first few chapters, and instead offers an insightful textual analysis of *Blue*. Again, he links the discussion to the arc of Kieslowski's career, describing it as a move "from Solidarity to solidarity," with the director abandoning politics to embrace "the whole man, with all his weaknesses." (172) This embrace is exemplified by the film's final panning shot which depicts its heroine, Julie, crying out, at last able to mourn, as she makes love to her dead husband's former musical collaborator. While the camera continues circling, we see her husband's mistress, pregnant with his child, Julie's mother, Julie's young friend at work in a strip club, and the boy who witnessed the car crash which took her family, all of whom miraculously appear to occupy the same diegetic space with her and her lover, and who represent, for Zizek, the "community of sinners" whose loving acceptance Julie is finally able to receive. But the crucial fact that she is having sex as this epiphany occurs displays the very human need for a fantasmic supplement which keeps the mind focused on something other than total immersion in the act of copulation—encapsulated in Lacan's pronouncement that "there is no sexual relationship." Ultimately, this reveals *Blue* to be a story not of breaking through a protective barrier and letting oneself go, but rather "a film about building a protective screen between the subject and the raw Real." (176) The elegant acuity of this reading, produced by wedding close textual analysis and psychoanalytic theory, presented as the finishing flourish of the book, can only give rise to a kind of wry disappointment that Zizek's abundant talents were employed in such a manner so sparsely throughout the rest of the text. And while this might not enable the easy extrapolation of any grand claims regarding "today's Psychoanalytic Theory," it still made me sad, really sad.

Greg Oguss is a freelance writer who writes on film, TV, and the media.

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Global Hollywood

By Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002/BFI, 2001. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper.

Recently, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that due to complicated changes in German tax laws, Hollywood might be losing its most significant source of funding outside the studios themselves. Because of quirks in German copyright statutes, film productions have qualified as protected tax shelters. Ironically, no group has benefited more from this loophole than the Americans—German investors have poured over $12 billion into Hollywood in the last five years, financing as much as 20 percent of the studios' yearly slate. However, if the expected changes take effect, the industry will have to either find the money elsewhere, or face a crushing loss of funding, work and future capital. This impending nightmare looming over the film community in Los Angeles serves as a perfect locus for the myriad issues addressed by *Global Hollywood* and its sweeping reconfiguration of prevailing theories about Hollywood's global dominance. Instead of the traditional attempts to reduce American cinematic imperialism to matters of textuality (taste), economics (organizational/industrial design), or cultural tyranny, the authors pose a much more complex and sophisticated model of global capital and labor to explain the ubiquity and power of the Hollywood machine. In the process, they reformulate the common understanding and interpretive designs that presently explain why American films reign supreme in theaters all over the world.

The authors state that their goal is to "thicken existing theories of global Hollywood's power, and modify current thinking about cultural policies that both enable and resist it." They accomplish this primarily by focusing on the New International Division of Cultural Labor, or the NICL as they call it, to understand how "an international division of labor links productivity, exploitation and social control," all in the service of a more profitable American film industry. According to *Global Hollywood,* U.S. popular culture was valued at $31 billion in 2000, with half of this revenue coming in from abroad. Pepsi-Co. spent $2 billion to sponsor *The Phantom Menace* and sequels. The average cost of releasing a Hollywood film in 1997 was $75.6 million. These monumental numbers (and many others) are used as springboards to examine how tax/currency/labor policies and practices, theoretical notions of nationhood, artists and audiences, and various industrial and world economies all contribute to the NICL and its fundamental imbalances. *Global Hollywood* is equal parts political economy, cultural studies, industrial economics, and cultural policy, and blending these various approaches dramatically raises the bar for future studies. The multilayered, interdisciplinary style employed by this book truly works—and works together. Often, such "methodological buffets" yield fractured and disjointed analyses with parts that do not necessarily relate to or enhance the whole. Not the case here; instead of merely pasting together a variety of snapshots from different critical lenses, the authors have actually crafted a thoroughly integrated revisioning of globalization. In so doing, they refine numerous definitions and constructs to create a new appreciation for the players in this global drama and their impact on one another. Media conglomerates, government subsidies, international trade and diplomacy, new technologies, film marketing, "runaway production," and even the idea of national cultural expression are all discussed in relation to the NICL in order to explain "how Hollywood works." The authors argue that in order to understand media texts, "we must consider all the shifts and shocks that characterize their existence as cultural commodities, their ongoing renewal as temporary 'property' of varied, productive workers and publics and the abiding 'property' of businesspeople," and in practice, they live up to the demanding standards of such a model. They decry "economic reductionism" and "textual reductionism" equally, and provide unique case studies to avoid the pitfalls of either one; an in-depth look at digital piracy, for example, yields a provocative discussion of such diverse concepts as nationality, authorship, active readership, intellectual property and its legal context, and new modes of distribution—all as they relate to Hollywood products on the global market. These detailed analyses untangle an exceedingly complicated web of financial incentive, legal frameworks, and business deals while also illuminating the manner in which Hollywood has participated in and sustained the creation of such an advantageous NICL.

Although the four co-authors divided up the various chapters (with the conclusion being jointly written), there are no distracting shifts in tone, rhetoric, or style to betray the individual voices in this collaborative effort. Instead, they maintain a consistently lively (and liberal) approach to the topic and a remarkably coherent focus. The technical language and business jargon, especially in chapters 3 and 4 ("Co-producing Hollywood" and "Hollywood's Global Rights"), might alienate some of the uninitiated, but overall it reads and flows quite well. The exhaustive references and the manner in which they are employed throughout also create an incredibly useful review of literature for a wide range of media studies and related disciplines. In the end, the authors shift the focus of ownership/authorship debates in the digital age from producer to consumer in a final example of how *Global Hollywood* embraces entirely new terms of discussion about global Hollywood. Understanding these dynamics, interrelated concepts, and expansive, fluid notions of causality as put forth by this book will undoubtedly enhance the efforts of scholars or industry observers in the collective, ongoing quest to understand the new media economy and decipher film history as it unfolds.

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Henry James Goes to the Movies

Edited by Susan M. Griffin. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2001. $27.50.

The New Yorker once featured a cartoon celebrating the Broadway return of *The Producers*. It pictured an audience rolling in the aisles—except for the single scowling face of Adolf Hitler. The book jacket of *Henry James Goes to the Movies* uses the same motif—with Henry James's face in the middle. Instead of the audience watching "Springtime for Hitler," James is surrounded by caricatures of Nicole Kidman, John Malkovich, Helena Bonham Carter and other actors in recent film adaptations. James looks enigmatic, as if he may or may not approve of these films or their scholarly discussion. Not that James disdained the other media. He yearned to be a playwright, though his only actual stage production, *Guy Domville,* totally flopped in 1895. But of course the Master's constant injunction was "Dramatize, dramatize," even when the only backdrop was a character's mind.

Professor Griffin's volume, organized in the chronological order in which the films appeared, illustrates at least three reasons why academics write about film adaptations: 1) to show how or whether a filmmaker has offered an acceptable visual equivalent of the novel; 2) to theorize about the narratological and technical problems facing adaptors; and 3) to use the adaptation as a "site" for ideological inquiry, especially to satisfy that postmodern appetite for subversive readings.

The achievement of the first task, if done well, contributes to that education of the masses André Bazin hoped for in "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest" (published in James Naremore's recent anthology *Film Adaptation*). Viewing film versions, as literature departments everywhere hope, might help students garner some experience with classic novels even if they don't have the time or literacy or patience to read them. In "Reexamining Bogdanovich's *Daisy Miller,"* Peggy McCormack tells us how much the film helped her students understand the novella. Unfortunately, she doesn't provide a description of how that happened. Instead, she offers a rather pedestrian critical review of the film turning mostly on the press furor over the adulterous romance between director and star. Cybill Shepherd brings "beauty" to the role, conveying the actress's own experience as an "object of spectacle," Bogdanovich's direction is "careful," the acting skills of Cloris Leachman are "considerable," and so on. Where other critics faulted Shepherd's lack of range ("she runs short of breath in the middle of lines and gives no sign of understanding the words she blurts out in little hiccups"), McCormack argues that Bogdanovich intentionally directed her performance to be insistently chattering. AnthonyMazzella, "'The Story . . . Held Us': *The Turn of the Screw* from Henry James to Jack Clayton," on the other hand, shows how Clayton's film does manage to convey some of the ambiguities of James's ghost story in a visual way, for instance, the question: Are the ghosts real or is the governess hallucinating? Mazzella points out that the supernatural or pathological cast can be exaggerated by positioning actors at extreme ends of the wide screen, as well as by shots of empty spaces, disorienting and increasingly dizzying sequences, "subjective shots undercut by objectified data," the low-angle shot of Peter Quint on high, and the like. The essay usefully explains how the film preserves the novella's sense of "intractable mystery." Its cinematic analysis seems more sophisticated than most of the others, which stress literary or ideological concerns.

The screen adaptation of James's *The Altar of the Dead* is usefully discussed by Matthew F. Jordan's "Mourning, Nostalgia, and Melancholia: Unlocking the Secrets of Truffaut's *The Green Room*." Noting the vague and unpictorial nature of the story, and how little concerned it is about the causes of the hero's obsession with death, Jordan argues that for Truffaut to pictorialize nostalgic mania, he had to provide more detail. Hence the montage sequence of the protagonist slogging through battlefield mud that serves as the film's preamble. Jordan's approach is psychoanalytic—mostly Freudian—but not jargon-ridden, and the discussion helps the viewer understand something of the protagonist's morbidity. Jordan demonstrates that though the film departs from the novel in some respects, it remains quite faithful to its spirit. But he doesn't redeem what in my view is one of Truffaut's more mediocre efforts.

A volume of essays on James adaptations would hardly be complete without feminist interventions, and this one does not disappoint. Hollywood has adapted *Washington Square* twice: Wyler's brilliant *The Heiress* (1949) and Agnieszka Holland's underwhelming *Washington Square* (1997). Two essays on these films (by Julie Rivkin and Karen Michele Chandler) are similar in tone, detail, and approach. Rivkin asks why filmmakers should want to adapt a novel whose heroine is "placid, dutiful, and above all undemonstrative," indeed, "opaque." That seems a bit exaggerated: Catherine Sloper's inner life seems demonstrative enough. In *The Heiress,* Catherine's character does sharpen, of course, as she revenges herself against both men who have failed her. But the marvelous scenario by Ruth and August Goetz does not depart as much from the novel as Rivkin suggests. Large tracts of sparkling Jamesian dialogue were preserved, especially in the encounters between Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend.

Rivkin and Chandler praise Holland's effort far beyond its due, I feel. Particularly troublesome is their praise for the Polish director's odd and inconsistent portrayal of Morris Townsend, whom they take to be a paragon of the sensitive male of the 1990's, calling him a "genuine if limited suitor," whose desire for Catherine's money "does not make him a cad but a self-aware person cognizant of his own limitations." In this interpretation, Morris knows "himself to be a narcissist," and generously allows Catherine to admire him. Both essayists take at face value, as truly indicative of his decency, the feeble lines given Ben Chaplin to persuade Dr. Sloper of his bona fides: "Catherine is so good and honest

and true. She—she lives in a place where everything is shining and clean and where everyone has the best of intentions," etc., ad nauseum. It is hard to believe that a Jacobin could bear to listen to such prose in the mouth of James's sly adventurer. Or to accept an adaptation whose theme is that "their love is more rather than less 'true' or authentic because the film acknowledges how money and beauty and social status all play a role in romantic desire." In other words, Why *not* marry for money if you can conveniently persuade yourself that you truly love the other? If the audience is made as gullible as Catherine about him, the whole ironic tone of the novel vanishes. Chandler even argues that unlike Dr. Sloper and is sister, "handsome gentle Morris . . . and Catherine are concerned with the wholeness of life."

An even edgier ideological excursion is Priscilla L. Walton's "'The Tie of a Common Aversion:' Sexual Tensions in Henry James's *The Other House."* The author finds in two film adaptations—Rivette's *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* and Truffaut's *La chambre verte*—reasons to find a homoerotic subtext in James's novel. *The Other House,* once obscure but now in fashion, is James's only murder mystery (1896). It concerns the murder of a child by a woman who wants to marry the child's father, a widower bound by a promise made to his dying wife that he would not remarry during the child's lifetime. Walton's essay is more a rereading of the novel than an explanation of how the French directors have adapted it. In Walton's view, "lesbian tropes . . . ghost [the] characterization" of the ardent murderess. I learned two new words from this essay that I'm not sure I want to memorize–"homotext" and "heterotext"—plus a vivid metaphor about how homoerotic subversion entails an "inside" and an "outside" and how the one "rubs up against" the other. Now, if called upon, I feel empowered to find subversive hetero subtexts in such films as *La Cage aux folles* and *Le Placard*.

In "Still Me(n): Superman Meets *The Bostonians,*" Leland S. Person similarly finds rich ground for the analysis of the relations among feminism, homoeroticism, and conservative politics. (*Still Me* is, of course, the title of Christopher Reeves's autobiography. Forget about the nonhomonymy.) Person ties the unfortunate star and the film to the sociopolitical context of the Reagan era (with its defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment), a context he finds similar to that of the 1880's, when a conservative establishment also opposed women's rights. It was no accident, he feels, that the actor who played Superman I through III should use a cape to sweep the heroine, Verena, away from her lesbian relationship with Olive Chancellor, much as his previous persona saves Lois Lane under *his* cape. In Person's view, though it departs from the novel by giving Olive the last word—a stirring feminist speech in an auditorium just abandoned by the rescued Verena—the Ivory-Merchant film essentially supports the conservative backlash against feminism, thus playing into the Reaganite "remasculization" of America. The essay argues that the novel "represents a more complex and unstable model of masculine identity . . . explor[ing] homoerotic desire by transgendering male identity." I wish Person had actually cited the passages in which he finds homoeroticism in Ransom's thought or behavior (as Graham does so admirably in her essay on *The Golden Bowl*). And I also wish that he would explain why James's narrator often seems as ironic about the contemporary feminist scene as is Ransom.

Nancy Bentley's "Conscious Observation: Jane Campion's *Portrait of a Lady*" is a sophisticated (perhaps oversophisticated) interpretation of this excellent film. It turns on the trope of "portrait," arguing that cinema, like Ralph Touchett, is well-positioned to watch Isabel Archer as spectacle. Bentley explains some of Campion's more enigmatic moves, like the images of unnamed young women in modern dress which open the film, as well as Campion's self-conscious avoidance of the traditional period look of costume film. Bentley defends the film against accusations that it violates the spirit of the novel, arguing that its explicit eroticization is not without precedent in James. The kissing sequences and Isabel's fantasy of being caressed by both Lord Warburton and Goodwood (with Ralph looking on) achieves a "disjunction" parallel to what James achieved by the indirection of his prose.

The last critical section of Griffin's collection is entitled "Getting James in the Nineties," a decade which produced four Hollywood adaptations, including the difficult late novels *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl,* and also one in which postmodern criticism buzzed around James. Especially attractive to these essayists are the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu. Dale M. Bauer ("Content or Costume? James as Cultural Capital") puts the most human face on an orientation that often obfuscates as much as it edifies. She distinguishes between James's actual substance and "James," the bit of social wealth possessed by those fortunate enough to go to college, where they learn how to use his name in conversation without having read him. She points out the dilemma facing any adaptation: How does the director make James accessible to the middlebrow audience? How does she convey not just the "simulacrum," but something of the Jamesian substance? According to Bauer, Iain Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* bridges the gap by filling in what James leaves elliptical: Millie's manipulativeness is erased, Kate is made nastier, and Densher more sympathetic. Sex, unarticulated by James, becomes graphic. As for the reader versed in James's irony, ambiguity, and tensions, those who go to see these films find that "part of the pleasure is . . . seeing what gets lost." Yes, I am of that group, and, conversely, I even admit that in the dark theater, I sometimes feel my brow sink a bit. But I find such pleasures a bit demeaning, to James if not to myself.

Dianne F. Sadoff, "'Hallucinations of Intimacy': The Henry James Films," also invokes the director's need to address the middlebrow or, in her phrase, "general intellectual" audience. To get their films screened at all, James adapters must work in a niche somewhere between art films and popular films. Whereas readers of James's novels enjoy "nuanced and psychologically complex plots," the intelligent generalist must be given "scenes of masculine abuse

[and] female ruinations," especially in an eroticized context. *The Wings of the Dove* achieved financial success (a success not shared by *Washington Square* or *The Portrait of a Lady*) because it satisfied both the middlebrow desire for the acquisition of cultural capital and the lingering need for popular pleasures—especially that of identification with the lovemaking of beautiful women and handsome men. If a soupçon of homoeroticism and sadomasochism gets tossed in, so much the better.

Alan Nadel's "Ambassadors from an Imaginary 'Elsewhere': Cinematic Convention and the Jamesian Sensibility" surveys the recent films with broad theoretical zeal. Unlike the other essays, which justifiably find James a hard nut for filmmakers to crack, Nadel's sees a weighty technical affinity between James and film's basic technology. Just as cinema relies on the persistence of vision effect, James's style conducts "experiments testing the threshold of cognition." Both cinema and James break down "the coherence of the social gesture or quotidian act . . . to its minimum thresholds of significance and then reconstitute [it] as the illusion of itself, as an imaginary plenitude." It's hard to know exactly what "testing the threshold of cognition" means, but whatever it is, James was hardly a unique tester, nor is the concept of cinematic "syntax" in any useful way related (as Metz's efforts showed) to "the chain of modifying clauses" that Nadel finds characteristic of James's style.

Marc Bousquet's "Cultural Capitalism and the 'James Formation'" also takes up the Bourdieu line, though it seems less about Jamesian adaptations than about *Notting Hill*.

Two essays on *The Golden Bowl* complete the volume. Lee Clark Mitchell's "'Based on the Novel by Henry James': *The Golden Bowl* 2000" is the best essay in the volume, and one of the best I've ever read about the film adaptation of a difficult novel. It gets to the nub of the issue: How can what is central to James's art—the internal views of characters, the "dilations of psychological nuance," only realizable by the most subtle narratorial indirection, what James himself called "a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action"—be captured by a medium so absorbed in surface appearances and so reluctant to use voice-over to convey narrators' attitudes and characters' inner lives? I agree with Mitchell's view that the 1973 Masterpiece Theatre TV version, directed by Jack Pulman, achieves more of the effect of James's drama of "pure thought" by providing an intradiegetic voice-over narrator (Bob Assingham), and having him ponder what the other characters might or might not be thinking. Mitchell compellingly shows how six episodes allow Pulman to incorporate goodly swatches of Jamesian prose. Series presentation is really more comfortable for adapting a long complex novel adaptation. As for the film, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala may be a brilliant writer, Mitchell feels, but she is no Jamesian. She externalizes virtually everything, focusing on "sexual transgression rather than the anxieties it arouses." (In fairness, Mitchell does acknowledge the excellence of bits like the staging of one of the adulterous couple's trysts in the Mme. Tussaud wax museum, where all the eyes of the figures seem to follow them. He also approves of Ivory's splendiferous choice of castles and props, though he correctly notes that James, for all his "scenic" reputation, rarely focused on literal surfaces.) All four characters in the film are profoundly mutated, engendering a melodrama of action rather than a drama of thought. Charlotte becomes a two-dimensional figure instead of the novel's more sympathetic "mind deeply and mysteriously in conflict with itself." Maggie and Adam Verver are also simplified: Jhabvala said in an interview that daughter and father "are all goodness." One comes away from this fine essay wondering whether *The Golden Bowl* could ever be made into a theatrical film or whether it is better suited to the television series approach. This is a question relevant not only to James's novel but to all the great psychological fiction of the twentieth century.

Wendy Graham's "Rift in the *Loot:* Cognitive Dissonance for the Reader of Merchant-Ivory's *The Golden Bowl*" is a good essay with a bad title. (All that Graham seems to allude to is the unJamesian character of the film.) Like Mitchell, Graham reads this supremely difficult and subtle novel well, and measures the simplistic reductions of the film against that reading. She stresses Prawer Jhabvala's simplistic interpretation of the "good" Ververs, showing that there's more than enough shadiness on their side as well. And James never intended Adam Verver to look like a hunk!

The volume concludes with a filmography compiled by J. Sarah Koch which lists released feature films and also many TV productions. Sarah Edgington and Steven Wexler add a "Bibliography of Critical Work on James and Film."

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Hollywood, Westerns, and the 1930s

The Lost Trail

By Peter Stanfield. Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter Press, 2001. $79.95 cloth; $29.95 paper.

In a critical age given to poring over nearly every piece of cultural ephemera from past centuries, it is still somewhat surprising to see a writer unearth a body of work relatively unexamined. Right under our collective inquiries, such works have been there all along. Yet we have ignored them, whether because we harbored concerns over their quality or because we simply, over time, forgot they ever existed. When some lucky writer brings them to our attention, then, we tend to feel an immediate sense of alienation from our own interests, as though the history we had constructed in our heads might just fall to pieces. Threatening our mental stases is exactly what good books should do, however, as we begin rebuilding with these new works in mind.

The process of recovering aesthetic works is particularly common in cinema histories, where new books continue to haunt our sense of the medium. If these critical gestures are familiar to us, however, the works themselves are rarely that. Such is the case with Peter Stanfield's *Hollywood, Westerns, and the 1930s: The Lost Trail*. While the Western is one of the most closely studied genres in film history, with analyses that reach as deeply into film theory as André Bazin, the series Western, particularly during its reign in Depression-era United States, has been mostly neglected. The films of this subgenre are the "lost trails" which Stanfield shows us. But his constant evocation and analysis of these works against the more prestigious Westerns of the larger studios make even more familiar ground feel "lost." Here, in the juxtaposition of the genre's two strains, Stanfield builds his history: "By viewing most of the major studios' significant Western productions made between 1929 and 1941 alongside a representative sample of series Westerns, and by drawing upon studio records, film scripts, and trade journal, newspaper and fan magazine discourses on Westerns, I offer the first substantial analysis of Hollywood and 1930s Westerns" (6). What was it about the series Western that might offer new ideas about the history of cinema? Why do we so rarely see it, whether on the shelves of our local video stores or even in college syllabi? How does it help us rethink the prestige Western? Stanfield's book aims to rectify our one-sided education on this genre, and, while the book contains a number of carefully nuanced critical strategies that are likely to encourage debate, the move to rekindle interest in the series Western is where he makes his greatest impression. It would not at all surprise me to see other writers take up where he leaves off, though he is already doing so himself (his book, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the Singing Cowboy,* recently appeared).

I feel obliged to characterize the book as favoring a scholarly audience of professional academics, though it does not exclude enthusiastic readers unaccustomed to specialized academic parlance. Considerations of race, class, and gender weave throughout the text and place Stanfield in a cultural studies milieu. He makes reference to other academic genre studies in order to contextualize his own approach within scholarly debate. In fact, we should read his work as part of a larger movement to rethink genre histories (see *Film Quarterly* 55:2 [Winter 2001-02], review of Steve Neale's *Genre and Hollywood* for a brief discussion of this movement in the work of Steve Neale, Rick Altman, and others). The writing, however, is very accessible, and readers who feel uneasy with certain passages will likely recover soon enough. Stanfield is, in fact, most at home when he straddles the faultlines of his audiences, and the heart of his lost trails, the series Western that he discusses in Chapters 2 and 3, provides the most fluid ascendencies of his prose. It was here that I encountered the line, "If Roland Barthes had ever listened to country music from this period he might have fashioned his ideas about *jouissance* on yodelling" (61). Such marvelous hybrids of dense critical theory and archaic popular culture make us want to learn more about both.

The book has three basic periods of historical development. It begins and ends with the two cycles of prestige Westerns at either end of the decade. Between these two periods of extremely high productivity, the Western, in most accounts, simply goes into remission—or, worse, exists only in the easily parodied, stiffly executed efforts of the mid-thirties series Western. Stanfield recasts that interim period as much more valuable than these accounts would have us believe and, in so doing, helps us understand more fully why prestige Westerns appeared when they did. This approach accounts for Stanfield's movement through different critical registers. At times, he focuses on exhibitor reactions to certain films; at other times, he engages larger social theories of race, class, and gender; he also lavishes praise on the talent of forgotten stars like Gene Autry. By juxtaposing several approaches, Stanfield allows us many different "trails" to peer down and invites further critical work on any of them.

Chapter 1, "The First Cycle of Sound Westerns," sketches the rapid rise and fall of the prestige Western at the beginning of the decade. Reading the early thirties, A-Class Westerns through the lens of trade presses, Stanfield zeroes in on the audience for these films and makes the case that female audiences were deliberately sought through romantic storylines and more active female protagonists. The Latin hero emerges as an important figure in this process, as he "validated an image of the male lead as romantic lover *and* man of action" (26). Emphasizing Depression-era studio retrenchment, Stanfield shows why Westerns then went B-class—at least, for a time.

Chapters 2 and 3 investigate the series Western in more loving attention than heretofore. Tracing exchanges among vaudeville, popular music, radio, and cinema, Stanfield outlines, among other things, a history of the "blue yodel." While careful not to ignore important origins such as blackface minstrelsy, he also celebrates this signature of cowboy singing: "At best, the yodel was more than a comic tag; it was a non-verbal statement of youthful bravado, a catharsis, Whitman's 'barbaric yawp'" (62). Gene Autry figures prominently in these chapters; here is a cowboy one is as likely to encounter on a radio show as a dude ranch. Other lines of inquiry include Will Rogers, sidekicks, and labor/capital disputes as allegory within the film narrative. These chapters, clearly the center of the book, are where readers are most likely to feel pleasurably lost.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 return to the prestige Westerns of the latter part of the decade. Beginning with a rising interest in the late thirties, these films culminated in the *Stagecoach* renaissance of '39 to '41 familiar to most readers. Here, Stanfield attempts to open a more fluid dialogue between these more canonical works and those of Chapters 2 and 3. He also accounts for the rise of this Western cycle outside of the frontier-myth narratives we have come to rely on. One alternative source he offers is a rising "Americanism," a conscious effort on the part of studios to encourage involvement in overseas conflicts through the indirect means of Westerns. Reframing a similar set of prerogatives from Chapter 1, Stanfield once again shows how the studios went after a female

audience, blending similar concerns with romance and active female roles into the plotlines. Also, as Westerns went prestige, so too did their actors; a film still shows Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney squaring off in *Oklahoma Kid*. Other highlights of the chapters include the Western's ability to thwart Production Code taboos as well as conscious attempts at authenticity by using actual historical outlaws like Billy the Kid. Stanfield's last chapter, "Dixie Cowboys," shows how the Western operated to "side-step" the inclusion of the American South in the Union by displacing it onto the Western. In the latter half of the book, then, while Stanfield admits to not showing many new titles, he aims to ground considerations of these films in contexts other than the frontier myth by considering "the perspective of their production and consumption contexts" (225).

In the end, readers are likely to share my interest in the series-Western chapters over the others, though the others are certainly useful. One might read a similar authorial preference in Stanfield's "Conclusion": "Particularly in the chapters concerned with series Westerns, this study contributes to the process of opening up film studies to the influence of cultural history that takes seriously cultural forms addressed to apparently marginal audiences" (227). Are we, then, to fault him for not focusing exclusively on the series Western? It would not be wise to do so. Had he only written on that subject, we might fault him for *not* situating his discussion against the more typical concerns of this genre's criticism—and within the larger efforts of Neale, Altman, et al. to rethink genre criticism. He aims, after all, for a complete history of the genre in this decade, and to exclude the prestige efforts would be as troubling as if he had not investigated the series Western. Now that he has written a more holistic historical narrative than we have previously encountered, we should look forward to even more esoteric journeys down lost trails, courtesy of this author. Perhaps Stanfield will yet teach us how to yodel.

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Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde

Edited by Bill Nichols. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001. $19.95.

I had a provocative encounter with a young filmmaker recently. In response to a question about influences on her work, she cited the films of Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky. These influences were intuitive. Her visually intense, narratively elliptical films have a psychosensual, dream-like logic. She relies particularly on what you might call a poetics of the cinematic, rather than on more conventional narrative tropes to tell "stories" that are obscure, emotional and atmospheric. One film used a triad of women —often engaged in mytho-mundane activities associated with their sex—and a shrouded figure who seemed to personify death to construct a non-linear retrospective contemplation of gender and meaning at the moment of a middle-aged man's demise. When asked about what would seem to be another obvious influence, the films of Maya Deren, the filmmaker flatly rejected the notion. She claimed never to have seen *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Deren's single most canonical and influential film (as well as one with which her film has remarkable affinities), and to have found the two Deren films she had seen—*At Land* (1944) and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946)—overly conceptualized and cinematically arid: all brain and no eyes (to invert Gerald Mast's apt formulation of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*)

I was perplexed and intrigued by her disavowal of influence because of what it says about Deren and her legacy as much as because of what it says about this interesting young artist and her anxieties of influence. I should add that those particular anxieties might be considerable. This young woman filmmaker was born and raised in the Ukraine and came in her teens to the U.S. (Deren was born in Kiev and moved as a child to Syracuse, New York). There is no need to investigate the other psychobiographical attributes that make this a potentially fraught problem for our young filmmaker; Harold Bloom has provided an eloquent explanation of what disavowals such as these are about. My encounter with the young filmmaker touched a nerve by adding yet another question or two to the growing litany of unanswered questions I have had to ask about Maya Deren, many of which are finally being addressed in the long overdue, collective examination, *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*.

Anyone interested in Deren and her work will want to read and probably acquire Nichols' volume. Not only do the eleven contributors in addition to Nichols himself cover a great deal of significant ground, but the volume also republishes, for the first time in about twenty years, I believe, the complete text of Deren's own most notable theoretical and aesthetic statement, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*. To say that Deren was no slouch of an intellectual and theoretician is an understatement. *An Anagram* is a complex and stimulating display of ideas, insight and erudition.

As rather an homage to Deren's, Nichols' volume offers, instead of a linear table of contents, an anagrammatic one. In theory, this attempt to offer ideas in a grid of diachronic and synchronic relationships to one another is admirable. In reality, it is somewhat fruitless, in both Deren's text and Nichols' book. Books are inexorably linear structures, in Western culture anyway: letter upon letter, word upon word, sentence upon sentence, paragraph upon paragraph, page upon page, chapter upon chapter, one thing follows another. How to group or structure different essays in a collective effort like this can be a dilemma. But readers tend either to start at the beginning, or to skip around according to their own idiosyncratic whims, or to shop through indexes for material that is of particular interest to them. Few will undertake to read a body of essays multiply, according to multiple relationships. And since, in the case

of *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde,* the individual contributions clearly were not conceived in terms of the identified axes of interest [Horizontal: "The Historical Lens," "In the Eyes of Her Contemporaries," The Terms of Her Legend and Legacy"; Vertical: "Deren's Work and the Arts," "Deren's Writings and Film Theory," "Deren's Films and Their Form"] and don't even numerically fit—a couple of quadrants contain two contributions—the volume gives the distinct impression that this was a conceit imposed upon the book, rather than a genuinely generative principle.

And these particular axes do not necessarily employ the terms you or I would choose to investigate. If I were to draw an anagram that would explore Deren according to my litany of questions, there might be four vertical axis: biography, history, historiography and theory; and four horizontal ones: intertextuality and interart, psychology and psychoanalysis, Surrealism; and feminism. But many of the questions that would arise in my anagram, are, thankfully, addressed in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*. These questions are about the situation of this singular woman artist in the wider context of American culture during and after the second World War. What were the theoretical and aesthetic influences on Deren's work? How is one to make sense of the obvious affinities of Deren's work with some major products of European Surrealism and the extent to which her imagery lends itself to a Freudian interpretation when Deren so strenuously rejected both Surrealism and Freudianism? Why did she reject these movements/theories? How does Deren's work relate to modernism generally? And more specifically, how does her work engage with developments in other fields, particularly those that are models for, or subjects of her films—i.e. poetry, dance, anthropology? How does feminism illuminate Deren's work and career?

The best essays in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde* address many of these questions. Annette Michelson's "Poetics and Savage Thought: About *Anagram*," creates a kind of primal scene of misrecognition by recalling the "Poetry and the Film" symposium moderated by Willard Maas in October 1953, in which Deren participated, along with Amos Vogel, Parker Tyler, Arthur Miller, and Dylan Thomas. After noting the "lordly contempt affected by intellectuals for seriousness in film and for the female subject as theoretician," especially in Thomas's derisive contributions to the discussion, Michelson proceeds to analyze Deren's theoretical contribution in terms of a daunting array of intellectual, political, and aesthetic sources and relationships, ranging from the work of Roman Jakobson and Sergei Eisenstein to T.S. Eliot, Georges Bataille, Jean Epstein, and ethnographer Alfred Métraux. Like several of the authors herein, Michelson focuses on Deren's increasing articulation of the importance of ritual and the ethical imperative of art. Michelson's analysis attests to the profound moral purpose of Deren's undertaking, one characterized beautifully as mediation "in the difficult and delicate negotiation of the marriage of poesis and mathesis, a union as scandalous and difficult in our culture as that sanctified by William Blake between heaven and hell."

Renata Jackson, too, in her contribution, "The Modernist Poetics of Maya Deren," focuses on Deren's theorizing and connects it to other major intellectual trends, specifically the philosophies of Hume and Bergson, but also the aesthetics of the New Criticism. This intellectual background, and its more organic relationship to a Gestalt psychology that is seen as its companion, suggests one facet of Deren's suspicion of Surrealism and Freudianism. Michelson and Jackson both look forward, noting, if not the influence, at least the precedent in Deren's theory, for work as diverse as Hollis Frampton's and Gilles Deleuze's.

Maureen Turim's welcome contribution, "The Ethics of Form: Structure and Gender in Maya Deren's Challenge to the Cinema," connects the ethical imperative in Deren's theory and practice to feminism, locating a vitally important facet of Deren's ethics in a feminist understanding of form. Turim's articulation of Deren's work as a kind of "visual anthropology" sees each film working out a different set of formal-intellectual problems: *Meshes of the Afternoon,* for instance, "meshes a wide range of ideas on memory and the psyche, repetition and variation, spatial and temporal cognition. The concepts include ones that subtend the process of structuration: parapraxis, game structure, ritual, the divided and multiple self, the self in relationship to other, and the death drive and murderous impulses." *At Land* "seeks to play theoretically with the process of identification between filmmaker, protagonist, and viewer." Turim's various insights, couched in elegant, complex language, serve Deren's elegant, complex films very well.

Uta Holl's "Moving the Dancers' Souls" is another complex and illuminating contribution that I found brilliant in terms of connecting Deren's anthropological impulse—her focus on ritual—to a rich knowledge of psychology, particularly those alternatives and precursors to psychoanalysis to which Deren would probably have been exposed by her father, the psychologist Salomon Derenkowsky. Holl more effectively than anyone before her, I think, addresses the paradox of Deren's polemic against and affinity to Surrealism, pointing out how close were her methods but how different her ends: "using film technique," Holl wittily concludes, "Deren set out to produce a reality of which the surrealists could only dream. By analyzing matter, time, and space, as the sciences do, in their historical implications, she considered art to be an experiment with reality itself." Ultimately, Holl persuasively argues, Deren is too much a formalist, indeed a classicist (as Deren herself put it), as well as a scientist of sorts, to submit to the surrealist revolution (of course, Deren, too, had her anxieties of influence).

The volume's other authors contribute lesser, but not insignificant insights into Deren and her work: her "legend" and its historiographic meaning and vicissitudes (Catherine Soussloff's "Maya Deren Herself"); her engagement with modern dance, especially African-American modernism (Mark Franko's "Aesthetic Agencies in Flux: Talley Beatty, Maya Deren, and the Modern Dance Tradition in *Study in Choreography for Camera*"); the way that her methods echo and continue the magical use of the cinematic medium that

originated with Georges Méliès (Lucy Fischer's "'The Eye for Magic': Maya and Méliès"); the world view toward which she moved in her ethnographic work (Moira Sullivan's "Deren's Ethnographic Representation of Haiti"); the essential bisexuality of her aesthetic (Maria Pramaggiore's "Seeing Double(s): Reading Deren Bisexually"); as well as the more personal, anecdotal reminiscence of Jane Brakhage Wodening and the homage of Barbara Hammer.

Only a few of my most troublesome questions linger. It will be for yet another study of Deren to address her in terms of two other colossal women in modern film history: Germaine Dulac and Leni Riefenstahl, in relation to each of whom I think Deren might be seen dialectically. Certainly that which is formalist and classical in Deren, as well as mythic, choreographic and ethnographic, points to certain problematic intersections with the career of that most problematic of film artists, Riefenstahl. Similarly, though less controversially, there must be something to be said about how Deren's understanding of mind and body, subjective and objective in film responds to the practices and theories of her feminist predecessor, Dulac. And despite the promising title of this book, it will really remain for another to draw a fuller picture of the American avant-garde to which Maya Deren belonged. Only the most cursory allusions to some key figures point to the ferment of American cultural life during and after WWII, in the wake of the arrival of émigrés, art and ideas from occupied Europe. Especially in the post-Surrealist ethos embodied by venues like the journals *VVV* and *View* and the Art of this Century gallery, there was a vital background to Deren's accomplishment that has been at best sketched here. I want more of the kind of intertextual, interdisciplinary work that Shelley Rice et al. did in connecting Deren to the photographers Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman in the exhibition catalogue, *Inverted Odysseys* (1999). Indeed, I would welcome a feminist view of Deren as *less* singular: one that examined her milieu with more archival and historiographic specificity and connected her to other women artists of the postwar period (Louise Bourgeois or Dorothea Tanning, for instance) who shared some of her concerns. When I first saw *Meshes of the Afternoon* the sensibility and the person of Maya Deren struck me like a thunderbolt. The bold, sensual, uninhibited, fiercely bohemian beauty and intelligence of this figure and her work seemed light years ahead of their time. I do wonder why today's young women filmmakers rarely claim Deren as their own "mother." But that is a psycho-social question and historical problem that may well be beyond the purview of this really ambitious, important, stimulating book.

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Rubble Films

German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich

By Robert R. Shandley. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001. $69.50 cloth; $18.95 paper.

As the first comprehensive study in English of German films made immediately after World War II, Shandley's book is a welcome and much needed addition to the historiography of German cinema and should stimulate, especially among U.S. scholars, a reinterpretation of German film history. The author pursues a two-fold purpose: a close reading of seventeen significant, representative films made between 1946 and 1949 as well as an examination of how these films treated the recent Nazi past. Rubble films constitute a specifically German genre that depicts life immediately after the war, focusing on the difficulties of obtaining the necessities of life, the psychological problems of the men returning from the front or from captivity, and the need to start a new life, with the ruined cities (usually Berlin) functioning both as the backdrop and as a metaphor for the characters' inner devastation. Critics have often compared these films to Italian neorealism, but as Shandley points out, the parallels are not totally valid. Neo-realism began as an oppositional cinema under Mussolini, not after the war; unlike the Italian films, which employed lay actors, the German rubble films hired professionals for the roles, and at times the ruined cities were recreated in studios.

Previous studies of post-war German cinema have been influenced by the Oberhausen generation and the ensuing New German Cinema. Declaring *Papas Kino* as being dead, the members of the loosely connected movement asserted that they are the true heirs of German humanistic culture and that they were the first to treat the Third Reich and its effects cinematically. Shandley does not belie this myth, but he does reveal how filmmakers in occupied Germany presented the Nazi period and its aftermath, albeit with varying degrees of honesty, effectiveness, and commercial success. A recurrent theme in Shandley's work is that the first post-war feature films produced in both the Western and Eastern sectors "must salvage a story of redemption from a morally defeated and humiliated nation" (p. 71), and in doing so, usually avoid "the most difficult but necessary aspect of honest reckoning with the past" (p. 189). A friend of Daniel Goldhagen (author of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*), Shandley, like most German scholars who have written on the subject, argues that the films consciously avoided representing the Germans' own responsibility for the atrocities committed during the Third Reich. While this criticism of glossing over their recent history applies to many rubble films, the author admits that the reasons for this avoidance, namely, the material, political, and commercial realities of the period, must also be considered. Daily survival was the primary concern in the shell-shocked country immediately after the war. The severe housing shortage in the bombed-out cities was compounded by millions of displaced persons who had fled from the Soviets. Brecht's famous line,

"Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral" (first you've got to feed us, then you can preach morals) aptly summarizes the motivation of the German population immediately after the war, and thus the question of collective guilt or responsibility was for many not a primary personal concern. The Nuremberg Trials basically placed the blame on the Nazi leaders. Even the DEFA newsreels about the trials had as the opening slogan "Never forget—they are guilty!" (*They* were the Nazi leaders, not the general public.) With increasing Cold War tensions, both East and West wanted their occupation zones as future allies. In addition, a direct and honest representation of the country's recent past along with accusations of complicity or collaboration would have been box-office poison.

In order to reach their audiences, the directors and scriptwriters avoided directly confronting viewers, as was done in Hanus Burger's documentary *Death Mills*, a film about the death camps that many Germans were forced to see. German filmmakers, both those who continued to work in the industry after the war—blacklisting of Third-Reich filmmakers was usually temporary—and those who returned from exile were torn by conflicting demands. Whereas the Occupation administrators wanted the filmmakers to "confront their recent history, anecdotes suggest that the censors were critical and suspicious of highly politicized treatments of the past" (p. 60), and the audiences did not want to be scolded like children when they went to the cinema. Many of the films made in the Western sectors tended to reinforce some basic myths: the Third Reich as an inevitable catastrophe that befell an ignorant or powerless people, and the soldiers, who are rarely depicted as National Socialists, just did their duty. Portrayal of the real victims and perpetrators is avoided, and in the creation of a post-war national identity, the films employ what Sabine Hake has aptly summarized as a "complicated process of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and denial" (*German National Cinema*, p. 96). Returning concentration camp victims and German nationals who have fled Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe become conflated in West German productions, and even the earliest East German DEFA films, motivated by "anti-fascist, democratic" (later revealed as a code word for socialist) policies and therefore more willing to confront the Nazi past, do not represent Jews directly on the screen. Is the character Mondschein, for example, in Wolfgang Staudte's *Murderers Are Among Us* (1946) Jewish or not? One explanation for the intentional ambiguity is the fear of racial stereotyping. In some productions made in the Soviet zone, there is also a tendency to emphasize the fate of socialists and communists over that of Jews during the Third Reich.

Both the West and East German rubble films combine the suffering of the victims of Nazism with the contemporary suffering German population. They focus on the "good" Germans who survived, with the villains being the Nazi leaders. In the denial of complicity for the Third Reich, the films absolve the "good" Germans, that is, those sitting in the audience, of any guilt. While West German productions such as Helmut Käutner's *In Those Days* (1947) and Harald Braun's *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (1947) avoid difficult questions and do not aim to present historical or critical analyses of National Socialism, they do not, with their flashbacks, look back with nostalgia at the Third Reich, as Shandley implies by entitling this chapter "It's a Wonderful Reich." The parallels he draws between these films and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* are not convincingly explained. What these films and others of the period do postulate is a new public morality. The lessons from the past are to be incorporated into the construction of the new post-war society—a democratic one in the Western occupation zones, and a socialist one in the Soviet zone. Rebuilding lives and the country were the most pressing demands. "Rubble metaphors gradually gave way to phoenix metaphors" (p. 150).

Seldom acknowledged is that the film officers of the four allied military administrations basically acted on behalf of their respective film industries. For example, Hollywood, arguing for open markets in Europe, had convinced the U.S. government that American films would teach the Germans about democracy. When Staudte approached Peter van Eyck, then the American head of the Film Section of the Information Service Control Branch, with his project for *Murderers Are Among Us*, he was informed that no films would be made in Germany for the next five years (some versions of the story have twenty years) except by the U.S., expressing the views of the Hollywood industry, which wanted to exclude Germany as a competitor in the European market. Moscow, on the other hand, was more interested in ideological education. Eager to restart the German film industry, the Soviets supported the founding of DEFA—the Babelsberg Althoff and Tobis Studios were given to DEFA in 1946, and the Ufa studios in 1948—and they worked not only with leftists and returning émigrés but also initially allowed the collaboration of bourgeois directors and screenwriters. Thus Staudte made the first post-war German film in the Soviet sector.

While there were numerous debates about creating a new cinematic language to address the country's post-war audiences, aesthetically the first post-war films usually resulted in a continuation of Ufa's melodramatic style with a humanistic message for the future; occasionally, directors such as Georg Klaren with his anti-militaristic *Wozzeck* (1947; not discussed by Shandley) would return to the Expressionist style of the early 1920s. Shandley's chapter on Staudte's *Murderers Are Among Us* is one of the most stimulating chapters in the volume. In his attempt to find a new style of filmmaking, Staudte mixes elements of almost every genre preceding it: gangster film, domestic melodrama, Weimar street film, film noir, and Western. Critics have usually commented on the film's return to Expressionist, low key lighting of some scenes, but here the author is most original and stimulating in his comparison of the plot with the Western, a genre whose conventions many later DEFA films would appropriate. Shandley sees the bombed-out buildings as forming urban canyons evoking the same sense of inner emptiness as John Ford's Monument Valley and draws other parallels to *Stagecoach*, in which the Ringo Kid (John

Wayne) avenges the murder of his father and brother. The physician Hans Mertens, the shell-shocked protagonist of *Murderers Are Among Us*, takes a gun to "do what a man's gotta do" and plans a showdown with his former commanding officer who had ordered a massacre of innocent men, women, and children in an occupied Polish village on Christmas Eve. The final shootout with the war criminal, however, is prevented by the civilizing Susanne—the idea of vigilante justice did not fit into the Soviet program for rebuilding the country.

The book's title, however, is slightly deceptive. Although all the films discussed were produced while much of Germany lay in rubbles, not all of them can be strictly categorized as rubble films. Of the five films discussed in Shandley's chapter on the representation of Jews in German films of the period, perhaps only the second halves of Josef von Báky's *The Last Illusion* (1949) and Herbert B. Fredersdorf and Marek Goldstein's *Long Is the Road* (1948) belong to the genre. Eugen York's *Morituri* (1948) deals with the persecution of Jews and other non-Germans during the war; Erich Engel's *The Blum Affair* (1948) is set in the Weimar Republic, and Kurt Maetzig's *Marriage in the Shadows* (1947) in the Third Reich. While the analysis of these films with the strongest political message is sound, this reader would have preferred more background information on *Marriage in the Shadows,* the most popular one of the group. This film is based on the life of the German Gentile actor Joachim Gottschalk, who took his own life along with that of his Jewish wife and son on November 7, 1941, to prevent them from being deported to a concentration camp. If *In Those Days* contains a scene in which the couple discuss their suicide, in *Marriage in the Shadows* there is no need to explain it. All of the films treated in this chapter can be classified as anti-anti-Semitic with a universal humanist message, and even the DEFA productions *Marriage in the Shadows* and *The Blum Affair* do not yet reveal any socialist ideals.

By 1948, the rubble films had already become the subject of cinematic parodies, and Shandley appropriately ends his overview with the year 1949, when cold war tensions resulted in the founding of the two Germanys and socialist realism became the dominant approach in the GDR. Elements of the rubble films continued into the 1950s, when overt Stalinist propaganda replaced the humanistic messages of the earlier DEFA films. The heroine in Maetzig's *The Story of a Young Couple* (1952), for example, leaves the decadent Western sector of Berlin to work in the more humane Eastern sector and pays homage to Stalin with an ode celebrating the construction of a housing project on Stalin Allee.

Shandley's study presents a wealth of information on the historical background and the differences between West German and DEFA productions. His insightful analyses of the films, focusing not only on plot and character, but also on camera work, are persuasively argued. *Rubble Films* should evoke a reconsideration of this neglected genre. Shandley is at his best when discussing the period and the films, but when he leaves the immediate post-war period, he reveals either shortcomings or carelessness. The names Luis Trenker and Willy Fritsch are misspelled; the name of a character in the film *In Those Days* is given as "Steffan" in the text (p. 57) and "Steffen" in the filmography (p. 214). Occasionally, the typing errors allow for interesting reading: "He has installed fear in the eyes of his enemy" (p. 41). Granted, this criticism is petty, but considering that this volume will become the definitive English-language study of rubble films for the near future, one would have expected closer proofreading.

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Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch

Edited by Stephen Prince. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. $49. 95 cloth; $14. 95 paper.

Stephen Prince's collection provides a diverse and varied amount of perspectives on a film now generally regarded as Peckinpah's masterpiece. This latest addition to Cambridge University Press's Film Handbooks Series examines *The Wild Bunch* in several contexts involving style, screenplay, ideology, genre, contemporary industrial practices, and politics. With the exception of Devin McKinney's solitary, but necessarily provocative, negative evaluation, all the articles acclaim a director once regarded as "morally depraved."

Prince's introductory essay, "Sam Peckinpah, Savage Poet of American Cinema," begins with the phrase "Running out of space and time in a modernizing West," which cinematically encapsulates many themes in this collection. This essay summarizes several key issues involving the director's early career, *The Wild Bunch*'s production, post-production, and reception as well as its relationship to later Hollywood forms of graphic representation already familiar to readers of Prince's *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies*. Paul Seydor's essay on *The Wild Bunch*'s screenplay again reveals the meticulous attention to detail characteristic of the Dean of Peckinpah criticism. The essay contains archive information concerning Peckinpah's authorship of the script—despite the fact that he never wrote the original story nor first screenplay. Christopher Sharrett provides lively perspectives on *The Wild Bunch*'s radical politics which debunked contemporary western generic contemporary conventions and recognized how a dead past "was probably always a deceit." (104) Michael Bliss's "'Back Off to What?' Enclosure, Violence, and Capitalism in Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*" investigates the film's use of space in terms of relevant issues of memory, interpersonal relations and capitalist contamination of human behavior. David Cook provides a contextually informative study of *The Wild Bunch*'s relationship to historical, contemporary, and future styles of violent representation, while Wheeler Winston Dixon makes some suggestive observations concerning the film's

relationship to television series and B Westerns. Devin McKinney's concluding essay "*The Wild Bunch*: Innovation and Retreat" contains a significantly dissenting voice. It also raises problems concerning both the film's current status within the critical community and some of the essays in this collection. McKinney believes that the current critical fascination with *The Wild Bunch* is "misplaced." (175) Although the director imposed a "radical form on pedestrian content" (176), McKinney defines the result "as reactionary as the dime novels that in another time had so brazenly mythologized the West, that eagerly constructed false truths and turned to the most bilious of homilies to quantify everything that was wild and inchoate in the youthful country." (177) Although performing the role of devil's advocate, McKinney does point out that *The Wild Bunch* still contains flaws and contradictions which Peckinpah overcame in later but still critically neglected films, such as *Straw Dogs* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* which further transcended generic limitations to present more radical visions of the human condition. *The Wild Bunch* was a necessary breakthrough but its narrative thematics proved unequal to a style which achieved better dramatic realization in later films.

Although McKinney's argument may be unduly harsh, the essay has an important stimulating function and it does say much about Prince's generous and impartial ability as editor to include it in this otherwise celebratory collection. But *The Wild Bunch* has, perhaps, become overcelebrated, leading to neglect of Peckinpah's other achievements. It is now his *Citizen Kane*. But *Straw Dogs, Pat Garrett, Junior Bonner, Cross of Iron,* and *The Osterman Weekend* also deserve detailed examination. *The Magnificent Ambersons, Macbeth*, and *Chimes at Midnight* were also significant despite the fact that they followed *Citizen Kane*. Yet a few of the essays in this collection do evaluate *The Wild Bunch* in relation to Peckinpah's other films despite the emphasis of this particular series on one film. Also, despite suggestive references to the influence of television and B Westerns on Peckinpah, Dixon needed to examine these works in depth rather than merely citing them. But overall, Prince has succeeded in his aim of editing a valuable contribution to this series. It should now lead to further studies of Peckinpah's other work and, perhaps, the restoration of *Major Dundee*.

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Science Fiction Film

By J.P. Telotte. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. $59.95 cloth; $21.95 paper.

As the first volume in Barry Grant's "Genres in American Cinema" series, J.P. Telotte's *Science Fiction Film* is a laudable, though cursory, overview of the genre standing at its center. With an easily read length of just over 200 pages, including dozens of illustrative photographs, detailed endnotes and a select filmography, it introduces many of the theoretical strains that have been used to unpack sci-fi movies and imbue them with meaning over time.

Invoking humanist, psychological, ideological, feminist and postmodern critiques, the book effectively applies these disciplines to films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Throughout this patchwork approach the book ends up building a subtext about science fiction being the most important genre currently operating in American movies. In part, we are told, this is due to sci-fi's mutability that has as much to do with the evolution of human technologies, be they cinematic, genetic or otherwise, as they do with the genre's fundamental curiosity about representing speculative experience.

By focusing on three of science fiction's core issues—science, technology, and reason—Telotte reasserts what he considers the central role of fantasy in contemporary films. Defined roughly as being the visualization of ideas normally restricted by the limits of possibility and imagination, fantasy serves science fiction movies as both their guiding impulse and as one of the overall genre's founding principles.

Moreover, Telotte is especially interested in those fantasy-oriented sci-fi films that blur genre boundaries and confuse the differences between high art and mass entertainment. That is, he carefully traces the interconnections of genre, as in the combination of horror and science fiction in films like *The Thing* or *Alien,* while also remarking on paradigm-shifting cultural experiences like the Machine Age and the Cold War. Clearly, however, his main emphasis is on the film texts themselves rather than the overall environment wherein these films originate. As his closing remarks specify, "Throughout this study of the science fiction film we have repeatedly taken up questions of borders and boundaries, in part because all questions of identity, including those relating to film genres, immediately seem to call for an outline, a point of separation between one thing and another. . . . At the same time, we should recognize that this issue is especially pertinent to any discussion of science fiction because its very subject matter—the reason-science-technology triad to which I have often referred in this book—typically focuses our attention on borders: the borders of our knowledge, those of our experience, those that separate us from what we often, from the vantage of today's thoroughly technologized society, might disparage as 'nature'" (197).

More important than this use of sci-fi movies as an imperfect mirror for understanding our cultural experience, at least for the novice film scholars for whom this work is intended, *Science Fiction Film* offers an historical overview of the genre dating back through its literary antecedents, seemingly to arrive at its purest expression in motion pictures. Never mind certain contemporary technologies like virtual reality or the World Wide Web that complicate the very idea of genre purity and, indeed, of media specificity more fundamentally, this affirmation of cinematic science fiction as a kind of revelatory collision between art and

experience gives the book a curiously dated quality that limits its impact.

Viewing his subject as both a genre with specific conventions, structures and icons, even production and exhibition methods, and also as a technologically dependent commercial form, Telotte falls short of fully addressing some of science fiction's more urgent contemporary concerns. This is not to say he ignores currently notable topics like genetic manipulation, gender confusion and apocalypse that have been brought to light in titles as varied as *Gattaca, Species* and *Armageddon*. Nor is it to assume he's less than knowledgeable on these subjects in light of his previous books, *A Distant Technology: Science Fiction Film and the Machine Age* and the extremely impressive *Replications: A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film*.

Instead Telotte's remarks about contemporary science fiction hint at areas of inquiry left to one side of the finished book. Had he spent more time expanding on these issues—to which could be added paranoia about individual identity, the slippage of history within societies that are dependent on informational media, the penetration of truth (un)making technologies in modern life, the omnipresence of visual surveillance as the basis of a panoptic economy and concern about the nature of God—his work would have acquired a timely "bite" that might have turned his book into truly original work rather than being a funnel for summarizing the efforts of many other previous writers, himself included.

Still, his overview of American science fiction, when framed by non-American works like *Metropolis* and Japanese anime, demonstrates how Telotte is energetically caught up in trying to resolve a difficult task. On the one hand he seems intent on delivering a primer about genre studies, generally, and science fiction movies, specifically. On the other he's trying to apply these ideas to individual motion pictures because this interpretive effort is, in many ways, the very thrust of his discipline and lies at the heart of cinema studies.

Addressing his authorial purpose, Telotte writes in conclusion about how the effort spent "looking at our science fiction films remains just an overlay, one tool that might be used along with a variety of others to help us ask questions about the genre. Insofar as it helps students to organize this field for their thinking, insofar as it draws them closer to the films and their implications for the American cultural landscape, insofar as it aids them in framing some of those questions about the genre, it should prove useful" (201-02).

It's finally this emphasis on offering, "a *useful* ground for genre thinking," (201) that points out the book's limitations while simultaneously making it a worthwhile introductory textbook for students and teachers alike. In rejecting any grand scheme about how sci-fi movies work in favor of synthesizing multiple critical frameworks, Telotte's book lacks the noble hubris of trying to be comprehensive. Even so, his long analyses of *THX 1138, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Robocop* and *The Fly* engage his theoretical and historical groundwork to offer an impressive clinic about textual interpretation. Yet even the strength of these interpretations is limited by Telotte's sidestepping a more thoughtful consideration of the socio-cultural context standing outside of, but contributing to, sci-fi movies and by his use of older examples to enliven his audience that may not be enamored of benchmark films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Blade Runner*.

Given how good the textual analyses are, I was left wondering why the book focuses on older, little seen films like *THX 1138* when its subject is ready-made to include new titles from Hollywood. Of course part of a scholar's impetus is to champion obscure work in order to shed light on more mainstream practices, but perhaps Telotte's project would have been better served with more contemporary examples. For instance, he repeatedly mentions the *Terminator* films, but uses *Robocop* to illuminate the paranoia of mechanization, corporate self-interest and the ethical problems of technological self-improvement. Putting aside arguments about how *Robocop* didn't originate any of these underlying concerns, nor did any other films discussed in the book for that matter, I wonder if *Total Recall,* a more popular title by the same director, or even the smash hit *The Matrix,* wouldn't have been more helpful in making Telotte's point. That is, if we are safe in assuming his intention was to examine sci-fi titles in relation to our lived experience and not just as examples of interpretive acumen without regard for seeing how given texts interact with, and shape, our cultural backdrop.

Maybe this sense of irritation stems from my being loath to accept a few simple remarks about cybernetics and postmodernism without also learning more about how those cultural expressions were formed outside the cinema. Or maybe my distaste comes from the book's reliance on films that are more than a decade old, thereby making the applicability of Telotte's ideas somewhat limited, with their nostalgia for what's already gone that will feel, for many potential readers, unrelated to the weekly cycle of new releases. As a limited on-ramp for entering into the critical, journalistic and popular record surrounding its named genre, *Science Fiction Film* achieves Telotte's purpose of being a useful survey. However, it's no more than a high level view of a vast and complicated topography and it leaves me feeling disappointed by the book's somewhat out-of-touch quality.

Rationalizing his project, Telotte closes his volume with words that remain idealistic. "We are already and always within that science fiction context, that land without borders, that world which bears all the trappings of a genre. An attempt to understand that genre better, or even to frame specific questions about its workings, can only help us to live in that world and perhaps to push a bit more effectively at its own boundaries" (203). I couldn't agree more with this closing passage but I do have misgivings about taking the author's sentiment too seriously without first flipping through his endnotes to decide what next I should read.

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Screening Asian Americans

Edited by Peter Feng. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002. $22.00.

The major accomplishment of *Screening Asian Americans,* a new anthology of essays on Asian-American media, is the crucial, yet underestimated act of selection itself, which has arranged Asian-American media scholarship of the last decade and more into an ordered and indispensable collection of its finest pieces. The range of the essays' origins, from journals of anthropology and sociology to film studies, reveals how wide a net Asian-American media studies casts over academic disciplines and how necessary it is to have a comprehensive anthology to cover this variety. Using his expertise in the history of Asian-American media as well as in the image of the Asian body in the American imaginary, editor Peter Feng manages to take the guesswork out of approaching the subject and using it in a way that doesn't diminish the complexities of critical studies. This book gets beyond the basic introductory framework of prior anthologies like *Countervisions* and *Moving the Image* by raising the critical and philosophical bar on talking about Asian-American representation. One way that Feng accomplishes this is by skillfully bypassing the de-rigueur self-explanation of Asian-American media scholarship that continually relegates it to the netherworld between ethnic studies and critical studies and, I would argue, prevents it from moving forward as a genre of scholarship in its own right. Although these historically necessary and valuable anthologies certainly paved the way for *Screening Asian Americans,* film and television studies had yet to find one that meets its own criteria of theoretical rigor. Perhaps in response to this, Feng has taken it upon himself to dispense with the repetitive need to explain what Asian-American media is to outsiders. This activity has produced an anthology of mostly exceptional articles that is the perfect textual accompaniment to university courses on any number of angles on Asian-American media: history and memory, race and representation, media and social change, postmodernism and multiculturalism, among a multitude of others.

Another way that Feng has succeeded with this anthology is by questioning the terms of Asian-American media scholarship itself as a field burdened with the weight of various binary oppositions that fragment and weaken its scholarly potential. For example, in his introduction, Feng says that although Asian Americans have been considered marginal in the black/white paradigm of race relations in the U.S., he emphasizes the importance of Asian-American representation as the central site of a dialogue on race, since "Asian Americans are alternately claimed as black and white" (2). Another assumed binary opposition Feng critiques is that of "independent" Asian-American film simply reacting against the dominant Hollywood cinema. Feng emphasizes that "conceptualizing Asian American cinematic practice in a narrowly reactive oppositional framework ultimately privileges dominant representational strategies: it implies that Asian American filmmakers take their cues from mainstream cinema" (4).

This last point may be the most important contribution of the book, that of moving Asian-American film criticism beyond the "negative image dominant" versus the "positive image independent" model toward one that considers the role of discourse and reception in the economy of representational strategies. Feng points out that "there is no such thing as a positive or negative representation, rather, there are representations that are mobilized positively or negatively depending on discursive context" (5). Indeed, *Screening Asian Americans* seeks to point out how dominant and marginalized cinemas define the either/or mythology of Asian-American presence, that they are either ultimately foreign or undeniably American. Hence, the title of the anthology does not refer to a "countering" or oppositional practice, but a "screening," a word that refers to the cinema as well as evokes a sense of evaluating the currency of the U.S. body politic in the Asian/American discursive framework, and also, the sense of "to conceal from view" (6), an activity that belongs not only to media makers, but to critics as well.

The essays of *Screening Asian Americans* are divided into three sections, although they are all primarily concerned with how Asian Americans are "screened." The first section, "Asian American Bodies," contains three essays about the trafficking of Asian-American bodies in "dominant representational practice" that provide a refreshing alternative to the usual essays pointing out the complex racist stereotypes and discursive strategies of Hollywood cinema. In particular, Sabine Haenni's fascinating study, "Filming 'Chinatown': Fake Visions, Bodily Transformations," discusses New York City Chinatown as the possible site of a modern, fluid subjectivity of Caucasian tourists and "slummers" by way of commodification through tourism and early cinema. Laura Hyun-Yi Kang's "The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies" frames U.S. dominant cultural representations of Asian women through contemporary anthropological discourse and dismantles fantasies of assimilation and false assumptions about multicultural progress by pointing to the continuum of the Orientalist discourse in narratives that maintain white patriarchal identity through the depoliticization of U.S. imperial history. Even Eugene Franklin Wong's classic "The Early Years: Asians in the American Films Prior to World War II," (seeming a bit outdated as it was written in the late 70s) nonetheless, with its new introduction, provides valuable historical insight into U.S./Asian relations during this era and provides a well-contextualized analysis of the "bad, foreign Asian" of Fu Manchu and the "good model minority" of Charlie Chan and variations thereof.

Part Two of *Screening Asian Americans,* "Histories of Asian American Cinema," lays out a dialectical, discursive dialogue among three essays, Stephen Gong's "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers, 1970-1990," Roland B. Tolentino's "Identity and Difference in 'Filipino/a American' Media Arts," and "A Peculiar Sensation: A Personal Genealogy of Korean American Women's Cinema" by

filmmaker Helen Lee. Tolentino's essay responds to Gong's seminal essay about the paradoxical situation of multiple Asian-American media centers by pointing out the limitations of the term, "Asian Pacific American." He argues, through the example of Filipino/a media practice, that this all-encompassing term only reproduces the reductive "othering" of dominant media industries. As an illustration of a kind of solution to the problem of Asian-American media historiography, Helen Lee provides a theoretical yet autobiographical perspective on the subject that illuminates history through memory.

In Part Three, we find a larger group of essays that considers the variety of discourses and contexts in which Asian-American film criticism has been produced and in the main argues for a reinterpretation of important Asian-American films and the assumptions made about them. These essays point to Peter Feng's notion of the importance of the varying discourses surrounding Asian-American films, and the nuance and complexity that these responses have on scholarship. By emphasizing the different facets and political valences in Asian-American self-representation, these essays make a point not of revealing how self-representation counters racist images, but rather of exploring the methods by which it is done and its effect on the particular critic. For instance, in Thomas Waugh's essay, "Good, Clean Fung," on the reconfiguring of Richard Fung's queer Asian-Canadian independent videowork as an engagement not only with race, gender, and sexuality, but also with class, nation, and community, the author responds to the way in which Fung's community-centered, AIDS education videos have been misinterpreted by the scholarly community and how Fung himself has been fetishized as "a postcolonial guru" by pointing out the local specificity of his work and its function as activist documentary. Another engaging discursive reinterpretation is Binita Mehta's "Emigrants Twice Displaced: Race, Color and Identity in Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*," in which she considers criticism of the film's mainstream stereotyping of African Americans and South Asian Americans through the problematic use of romantic coupling to obscure more pertinent interracial politics, yet argues for the film's commitment to providing a relatively subtle representation of these same issues. Other essays in Part Three consider some of the most important Asian-American films in the last 30 years on their own terms, rather than as films simply serving to oppose the dominant media industry. For example, "Historical Consciousness and the Viewer: *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*," Bill Nichols' astute analysis of Renée Tajima-Peña and Christine Choy's film, opens up the complex richness of this vital film by delineating its rare ability to represent an unrepresentable history of an unspeakable event. Feng's discussion of the irreconcilability between the discourses of postmodernism and the discourses of multiculturalism in "Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: *Chan is Missing*" is important for its engagement with and explanation of core conflicts between Western critical discourse and ethnic studies. Marita Sturken's "The Politics of Video Memory: Erasures and Inscriptions" talks about the creation of "counter-memory" in Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* and discusses the representational value of the Japanese-American internment in experimental video. Other essays point to the strong presence of feminist, gay and lesbian, APA (Asian Pacific American) experimental film and video, as well as the important issue of the transnational context of Asian-American media in the process of "screening Asian Americans." Lynda Peckham's "*Surname Viet Given Name Nam*: Spreading Rumors & Ex/Changing Histories," about Trinh T. Minh-Ha's exploration of women's silence and the fractured history of the Vietnam War, offers a terse, if short, analysis of a film that influenced a generation of feminist, gay, lesbian, queer, and exilic film and video artists in the 1990s. Jennifer Guarino-Trier's intricate comparison of the films and writings of Korean American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha with the video work of Yunah Hong, "From the multitude of narratives . . . For another telling for another recitation: Constructing and Reconstructing Dictée and Memory/all echo," also offers a deft comparison of the two artists' work that encourages looking at a genealogy of feminist, diasporic, APA video. Mark Chiang's "Coming Out in the Global System: Postmodern Patriarchies and Transnational Sexualities in *The Wedding Banquet*" brackets the evaluation of Ang Lee's film's recapitulation to dominant narrative strategies in lieu of understanding the context for locating its complex economy of gender, race, class, and nation, and in particular, the oft-neglected question of class consciousness in Asian-American communities. Finally, Gayatri Gopinath's "On *Fire*" complements Chaing's piece by examining the complicated production and reception history of Deepa Mehta's 1996 film and how it has negotiated its conflicting meanings within varying contexts of globalization, diaspora and lesbian and gay identity politics.

The acts of reading and scholarly argument are crucial in this anthology, which establishes Asian-American film criticism as a bona-fide field. Overall, *Screening Asian Americans* presents an excellent array of essays on Asian-American media around a sound organizing principle that in itself will propel discussions about the subject forward, toward even newer configurations of the field.

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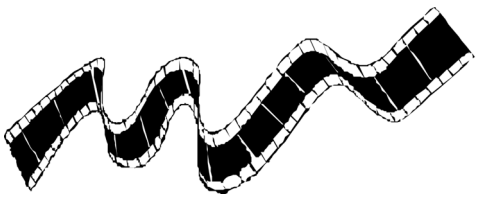

Screening China

Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema

By Yingjin Zhang. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002. $50.00.

Yingjin Zhang's new book is the first in the series of Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies to deal with Chinese cinema. As the title indicates, it delivers an engagement, both most welcome and comprehensive, with the politics of exhibiting and studying Chinese cinema in the cross-cultural context, especially in Euro-American venues. Laying out three meanings of "screening" (5), Zhang teases out the complicated relationship between China-made cinema and "China", both subjected to the Western "gaze." This allows the book to distinguish itself from the species of "screening" works by framing textual analysis of individual films within a significantly larger discursive field, namely, how "China" is screened through the complicated *apparatus of film politics* that informs practices ranging from film production and exhibition (especially at international film festivals) to disciplinarization of Chinese film studies in Western academia. Divided into two parts—"critical interventions" and "cinematic reconfigurations"—the work mainly takes issue with Eurocentrism, and contributes to rethinking and remapping the study of Chinese as well as other non-Western films in the globalizing and hierarchical system.

Zhang's work canvasses diverse discourses on or related to Chinese cinema (including historiography, criticism, and popular reviews) by scholars both inside and outside China, from the beginning of Chinese filmmaking in the early twentieth century to the most recent film events. The wide scope leads to something resembling an archaeology of the "cultural history" of Chinese cinema.[1] Following Sheldon Lu's initial advance in theorizing transnational Chinese cinema, Zhang explores its up-to-date "translocal, transregional, and transnational movements" (314).[2] Zhang's strength lies specifically in his discussion of new developments in mainland filmmaking (such as New Year pictures, "New Mainstream Film," and new alliances), which result from frequent traveling of filmmakers as well as films (317-31). Another exciting dimension of the book is that it systematically brings films from different geocultural spaces (both regional and national) into dialogue with one another. Thus the "autoethnographic" films (Mary Louis Pratt's term) produced by Mainland's Fifth Generation are related to the turn to the "native soil" (*xiangtu*) in Taiwan cinema in the 1980s and 90s on the one hand, and on the other hand, to Hollywood's orientalist figuration of China in the 30s and 40s (Section III, Chapter 6). Likewise, Zhang's engagement with urban cinema encompasses films made in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Taipei, addressing a "glocal" city imaginary (Roland Robertson's term) (Chapter 7). Zhang's agile interweaving between a wide range of films from different geocultural spaces and his thoughtful engagement with diverse critical discourses ensure the scope and depth of his discussion, as well as the multifaceted richness of his materials. Standing in between Chinese cinema and his training in humanities in North America, Zhang, siding with Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's agenda of "unthinking Eurocentrism," vigorously promotes decentralization of all forms of Euro-American cultural hegemony. Indeed, he concludes the volume with a quote from Shohat and Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism,* contending that, instead of sticking to the model of center and periphery, one needs to see time as "scrambled and palimpsestic" (Shohat and Stam, 293), hence the "coexistence of the premodern, the modern, the postmodern, and the paramodern in the vast but geographically dispersed spaces of China and the Chinese diaspora" (347).

The palimpsest quality is accurately borne out in a China that has experienced sea changes since the turn of the 1990s, both vis-à-vis its former self and in the global system. Whereas the former necessitates Zhang's deliberation on the contesting attempts to name post-Mao China as "postmodern," "postsocialist," or "postcolonial," the latter brings up an important question that he touches on only briefly: how China's incorporation into the World Trade Organization will affect Chinese cinema. After observing that the New Mainstream Film serves as a resistance to Hollywood's potentially deepening invasion (329), Zhang stops short of elaborating systematically on how China's economic and political repositioning in the global system will reshape Chinese film culture and politics. Given the historical as well as intellectual position of this volume (that is, it not only bridges cinema's first and second centennials at the cusp of the second millennium, but also mediates Chinese cinema and the cross-cultural discursive field), it would have been desirable for Zhang to focus more on how China will be "screened" through cinema after it joins the WTO. Zhang perspicuously points to new alliances that Mainland's filmmaking has adopted in response to globalization, one of these alliances being women émigré directors' return to China to make films. However, in the absence of further argument, one is left wondering how Zhang conceives the filmmaking of diaspora Chinese in relation to his remapping of Chinese-language film. This question in turn leads to further interrogation of the validity of such terms as "Chinese cinema" and "transnational and trans-regional cinema" (which are crucial to Zhang's writing) in various historical periods. For example, one would like to ask how transnational and transregional activities figured into early Chinese cinema in the first half of the twentieth century as differentiated from their manifestations in the late twentieth century. Besides, given the ever-changing circumstances under which Chinese cinema has experienced constant reconfigurations, which Zhang quite usefully emphasizes, one eventually faces the question of the extent to which the rubric of "Chinese cinema" can remain a productive category in the increasingly divergent practices and nuanced discussions. If we need new terms for the field, what options do we have? Pluralizing

"Chinese cinema" into "Chinese cinemas"? Using individuating terms such as "mainland film," "Hong Kong film," "Taiwan film," without resorting to a general rubric? Encompassing them under "Chinese-language film"? Each of these will necessarily entail a distinct set of problems as well as advantages. Perhaps the field of Chinese film studies can develop precisely because it will keep on slipping through and challenging any a priori categories and any disciplinary approaches. The most essential contribution of *Screening China* therefore lies in three aspects: its engagement with issues of transnationalism and globalism and their role in (re)shaping Chinese cinema in its first hundred years; its persistent questioning of how "China" is screened and the ideological implications of "screening China"; and its thought-provocating summary and critiques that effectively encourage readers to raise further questions and issues. In general, the force of the work comes from Zhang's lucid writing, tight structure, systematic argumentation, and kaleidoscopic materials, which render the work both accessible and useful for a variety of readers, from students and researchers to the general audience. The book can also double as a handy information kit, thanks to Zhang's inclusion of a comprehensive character list, a lengthy filmography of mentioned films made since 1905 (complete with year of production, director, studio, and location), and a rich bibliography containing important references for diverse China-related fields in liberal arts.

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Notes

1. The term "cultural history" is borrowed from Roger Chartier, *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 20–21.
2. Sheldon Lu designates Chinese cinema as "transnational" in the collection he edited, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997)

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Westerns

Films Through History

Edited by Janet Walker. New York and London: Routledge, 2001. $85.00 cloth, $22.95 paper.

With the gentle pun of its title, *Westerns: Films Through History* promises us both a sense of retrospection and a particular definition of the genre. As the reader of this new volume will discover, while it does consider a wide range of films *through history*—from early silents to recent revisions—the strength of this collection lies in the title's other meaning. That is, the authors wish us to understand the way in which westerns do their work *through* the contested terrain of history and historical accounts, not only drawing upon historical material but also engaging in their own work of making histories. The chapters (most of them new for this collection, with a few revised from earlier publications) consider, in turn, revisionist westerns from the 1990s; Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and the moving and still images that circulated around it; international westerns; and numerous classical westerns about which there is still much more to be said. While the topics of these essays and their grouping initially appears quite disparate, the links become clear as the authors' texts circulate around similar problems of authenticity, narration, and constructions of the past.

Janet Walker's excellent introduction sets out the framework for the volume. She addresses the possible obviousness of the book's central focus—don't we already know that these are "historical" films? By tracing several ways by which questions about history have been approached in western criticism, however, Walker demonstrates how the role of history is paradoxically erased from many accounts which instead end up stressing narrative structure, mythical functions, iconography and the like. In much of the literature on the western as genre, writes Walker, sustained consideration of the historical function of the films is "usurped by formal and ideological issues" (5). Even those accounts of the genre that seem motivated by historical questions often avoid treating the films' "profound and multifaceted historical and historiographic functions" (7) by focusing instead on factual inaccuracies or distortions, or by making a final distinction between "history" as it has been written, and the films as mythological interpretations of that history. Instead, Walker suggests that western films themselves have a historiographic function; that is, they not only interpret other (written or "official") histories, but they actively intervene to create and disseminate histories of their own.

This insight serves us well in reconsidering such a diverse and fragmented genre, one that has often occasioned much debate about its racial and gendered politics. As with other recent collections like Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein's *John Ford Made Westerns,* or Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson's *Back in the Saddle Again,* Walker's anthology treats the westerns it studies as complex texts which are often highly sophisticated in their creation of narratives of settlement and nationhood. While some westerns can be seen to embody and recreate ideologies of Manifest Destiny and white supremacism, many invite other kinds of historically-attuned scrutiny which often reveal different and more subtle meanings. In their close attention to westerns as anything but univocal or naïve about such matters, the writers in Walker's volume help us to look differently at questions of race, gender, and nationalism in western films.

Alexandra Keller's essay on *Posse* (1993) opens the section on contemporary westerns. Keller sets 1990s westerns generally within the context of postmodernism in their "generic destabilization and the questioning of traditional myths and master narratives" (28). After a discussion of the

films *Walker* (1987) and *Dances with Wolves* (1990), in which she distinguishes between the latter film's "nostalgic revisionism" (which sought to rewrite history while maintaining a realist mode) and the more complex "reflexive revisionism" of the former (in which the idea of historical telling is itself questioned), Keller then turns her attention to *Posse* as a film which unusually manages to be both "radical in its discursive impulses" (35) (like *Walker*) and popular in its reach (like *Dances*). Keller carefully exposes the complexity of the film's racial politics and the way in which it relies on the conflicting impulses of identity politics more generally. Seeing the film as one of an "increasing number of westerns that go out of their way to hail previously marginalized identities," (44) Keller finds the film's most remarkable characteristic is its solicitation of black spectators, and in its willingness to use western spaces and generic codes as sites for the imagination of an urban black experience. Keller's engaging reading of this "black western" is an excellent and appropriate first essay in a section devoted to the challenges of the 90s western.

The other two essays in this part of the book turn to two of the more well-known contemporary westerns, *Dead Man* and *Lone Star.* Tomás F. Sandoval Jr.'s article considers *Lone Star* through the lens of Hayden White's influential essay, "The Burden of History" and argues that the film's concerns are similar to White's, since both deal with the problem of how one might reconcile the past with the present in a way that is liberating rather than restrictive. Certainly *Lone Star* makes an apt testing ground for White's theses, but there is a sense in which Sandoval's essay becomes overly reductive. In arguing that "the film arrives at conclusions that exemplify the ideas of Hayden White," (74) or that it "pay[s] heed to White's described limits of metaphor construction," (82) Sandoval seems to allow no possibility that the film might itself challenge or unsettle the theory in any way. Rather, in this essay, the film neatly proves the theory that precedes (and even prescribes) it. Melinda Szaloky's work on *Dead Man,* however, digs much deeper into the film's complex layers in a reading informed in part by Derrida's concept of erasure (developed at length in an essay by Gregg Rickman, not in this volume). Szaloky's analysis also turns to Barthes and de Certeau to make sense of the role of the frontier myth and its effect on the narration of "history," but throughout the essay Szaloky confidently negotiates the space between her theoretical sources and the film itself, shedding light on the working of each. By emphasizing the ways in which the film "dismantle[s] basic genre conventions of the western, as well as simplistic . . . revisionist strategies," (49) Szaloky continues the emphasis on 90s revisionism which the previous two authors have begun.

The second part of the book discusses the phenomenon of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the traveling show orchestrated by William F. Cody that was a worldwide success between 1883 and 1917. Buffalo Bill is approached in many incarnations here. William G. Simon and Louise Spence's essay centers on Robert Altman's film, *Buffalo Bill, or, Sitting Bull's History Lesson* (1976) and its ironic displacement of the authority of Cody's legacy. Simon and Spence demonstrate with careful close reading how the film develops a self-consciousness which highlights "the discursive nature of all reference" (91) and which asks questions of how history, "the real," and biography might be represented. The authors also consider the complex operation of star discourses in the film (Paul Newman plays Cody, and Burt Lancaster also stars), as well as linking the film to other, earlier examples which also dramatize questions of historical record and accuracy, most prominently, Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). References to Altman's film also appear in both Joy Kasson's and Corey Creekmur's later chapters. Kasson considers the influence of Buffalo Bill's show, with its enactments and re-enactments of famous scenes from Bill's career, on the nascent American film industry that was already producing short western dramas by the time of the show's demise in 1917. Cody himself recognized the new medium's role in creating the same kinds of historical spectacle which his show popularized, and in 1912 he appeared as himself in the film *The Life of Buffalo Bill* (1912). Kasson shows how that film, and *Indian War Pictures,* which was released the following year, tried unsuccessfully to dramatize the events from Cody's life that were so popular in the Wild West show, such as the re-enactment of the Battle of Wounded Knee and the death of Sitting Bull in 1890 (also the basis for Altman's film). Kasson argues that while the films failed for audiences accustomed to his stage show, they nonetheless participated in the development of "a vocabulary of incident and image that would become standard—even clichéd—to filmgoers around the world" (125). Corey Creekmur develops Kasson's interest in biography and representation by considering in detail two of the thirty-five films that were made about Cody. Creekmur turns to George Custen's work on the biopic to further inform his suggestions about the prominent role that the biographical impulse plays in many westerns and his detailed discussions of *The Life of Buffalo Bill* (the same film considered by Kasson) and *Buffalo Bill* (1944) focus on the interplay between reality and artifice that structures both films. One of the key insights of Creekmur's essay is its insistence on the futility of holding biopics, or westerns more generally, to the standard of "historical accuracy" when they, like other forms of mass entertainment, usually involve a balance of details that are "historically jusitified" and those that are "errors," as he puts it. Returning to Altman's revisionist version of Cody's life, Creekmur contends that it "is finally no more historically accurate than most Cody films" (136) and warns that its "cynicism might be more easily mistaken for accuracy" (140). Creekmur's worthy caution thus intervenes in the frequent debates over the historical status of westerns that Walker has alluded to in her introduction.

The next two essays in the volume address the undertheorized area of film music in westerns. Claudia Gorbman's "Drums Along the L.A. River" traces the history of music that accompanies onscreen images of Native Amer-

icans, analyzing the familiar clichés of tom-toms and "warpath" music and their continuation well past the point where, she argues, the image track had begun to revise its representations of Native Americans. It was not until the 60s, she offers, that western scores began to alter the fundamental patterns employed in classical westerns. Leonard Rosenman's score for *A Man Called Horse* (1970) "matches [the] pseudo-anthropological project" (188) of the film by attempting to translate Indian music into the language of a western modernist tradition. *Dances with Wolves* also manages such a translation, but here Gorbman points out not only the political consequences of "translation," but also the re-inscription of dichotomies of self and other that occur as one group of Indians are given "the same lush musical language as the good white protagonist" (192) while another is given the angular modernism of otherness.

Kathryn Kalinak focuses on a very different form of film music, the western folk song, and her brilliant essay exposes the roots of this form in a most unlikely place—blackface minstrelsy. Beginning with a question about authenticity, Kalinak notes: "While it is true that many songs reproduced in westerns were actually sung on the frontier, it is equally true that many of those same songs trail in their wake a complicated, overdetermined, and multifaceted discourse of blackface minstrelsy that has been all but elided for contemporary audiences" (152). Using the example of Stephen Foster's well-known song "Oh! Susanna," Kalinak analyzes the intricate web of racial discourses that the song puts in play. Originally a minstrel song that relied on a nostalgic construction of a Southern pastoral tradition, "Oh! Susanna" was later used in films like *The Covered Wagon* and *The Telegraph Trail,* and Kalinak discusses each film at length to demonstrate what happens when the complexities of minstrel songs meet the ideological traffic of the western. Peter Bloom's essay also addresses some of the unlikely genealogies of the western with its discussion of a contemporary Algerian transformation of an earlier French western. By creating a new post-synch voice track for the French film *Dynamite Jack* (1961), comedians Fellag and Allalou created a "new" film, *Dynamite Moh* (1996). With its Franco-Algerian Arabic voice track, the film becomes a satire on contemporary Franco-Algerian politics. Bloom presents a fascinating account of the film's context by tracing the circulation and reception of American westerns in France and, in particular, the North African colonies. Bloom suggests that North African audiences were able to appropriate and re-interpret the themes and characters of American cinema in resistant readings which spoke to their own political situation. Bloom's essay thus adds a much-neglected international perspective to the study of the western, one that extends the scant literature on European westerns to provide further insights.

Janet Walker closes the volume with an essay on the role of trauma in western films. Noting the frequency of narratives that involve a "catastrophic past event," Walker works more closely with several of these "traumatic westerns," notably *The Searchers* (1956), *Pursued* (1947), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), and *Lone Star,* to show how the captivity narratives and familial conflicts of these films tend to cover over the violence of western settlement and dispossession. The horror of these events, rather than being immediately accessible in these films, tends instead to appear in the form of traumatic flashbacks, recurring dreams, or recollections. Walker weaves together insights drawn from literature on trauma and post-traumatic stress as well as relevant literature on the west to isolate a subgenre of the western in which the unresolved trauma of a violent past figures prominently. By returning to themes raised by many of her other contributors—western films' writing of the past, the problem of historical representation, questions about the "unofficial" histories that white settlement often ignored—Walker's essay makes a fitting conclusion to a collection that brings new and diverse perspectives to the problems of history and western films. While the flow of the book seems a little jerky at first (I initially found myself wondering why the editor chose to start with the contemporary revisionist westerns, then move to extra-cinematic models like Buffalo Bill before returning, again, to a film like *Lone Star*), by the end an interesting and pedagogical logic emerges. While many of us might look first to westerns of the past ten or twenty years for revisionist or historically sensitive tendencies, the contributors to *Westerns: Films Through History* demonstrate convincingly that westerns have always been speaking about history and the problems of historical representation, and that when we approach them with this fact in mind, we might be surprised at what we learn.

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Errata

The following corrections should be noted for Noa Steimatsky's review of *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, published in *FQ* Volume 56, Number 3 (Spring 2003). On page 54, in the left-hand column, the sentence beginning "But not this nor any of the essays, . . ." should have continued "not even the epigraphs, explain to me the subtitle of the volume—Magician of the Real—one that would seem to designate a Fellini or a De Sica, rather than the aesthetic complexity and pitfalls, the pedagogic utopianism, the high seriousness, the *ambition* of Rossellini's project." This editorial error was compounded when, in the biographical line, I mistakenly referred to Noa Steimatsky as "he" rather than "she." Sincere editorial apologies to the author for these mistakes.

Ann Martin